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THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Election 2000 Politicians and the Press



What are the dangers when journalism becomes entertainment and politicians become celebrities?

A Report From the Third Watchdog Conference:
How the Press Covers Politics

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Watchdog Conference

‘The key point of concern at this conference is the impact of the rush toward a more entertaining journalism that is focused on celebrity and examines issues in the context of personality.’

—Bill Kovach

Nieman Curator Bill Kovach opened the political Watchdog Journalism conference, held at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. in October 1999, with cautionary words about press coverage of this election cycle.

“I was just at a conference last week at the Ronald Reagan Library. And several things about that conference sort of crystallized some thoughts in my mind. The program, ‘Can Democracy Survive the Mass Media,’ began with a series of film clips put together by Marty Nolan of The Boston Globe about how Hollywood looks at the press. The scene that most struck me in connection with what we’re thinking about today was a scene from the old movie, ‘The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance.’ It’s the scene at the end when the publisher decides to suppress a major exposé of a major politician by saying, ‘When the legend becomes fact, we’ll just print the legend.’

“The key point of concern at this conference is the impact of the rush toward a more entertaining journalism that is focused on celebrity and examines issues in the context of personality. At that conference there was an acknowledged expert in that field, Steve Coz, Editor in Chief of The National Enquirer. Steve had some interesting things to say about this process of turning politicians into celebrities. ‘We in the press,’ he said,

‘are creating a society in which celebrities influence all areas of life and now reach for political power. When politicians become celebrities, celebrities become politicians. When politics become the playground of celebrity it benefits us at The National Enquirer because we’ve already been through the looking glass.’

“It’s the tendency to focus on the celebrity, the character, not serious character but personality traits of political figures that trivializes the political process. So the focus of this discussion will be on issues which might be overlooked or underreported in the 2000 campaigns. Issues like those that David Broder spoke of last May when he wrote in his column that it’s quite a trick for something to grow larger and at the same time become more invisible. Broder was talking about the health care issue then, but he might just as well have been talking about any one of a number of issues that loom ill-defined in the background of the campaign rhetoric that focuses on youthful indiscretions or political money.” ■

Are We Asking the Right Questions?

Are members of the press asking candidates the right questions? What should those questions be? A number of panelists, including journalists and politicians, had some ideas about specific topics that should be addressed and ways for reporters to do so. Excerpts from these discussions follow.

Ray Suarez, senior correspondent, “The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer,” and panel moderator: “One question that reporters don’t usually ask but are getting an opportunity this morning to ask is, ‘Are we asking the right questions?’ Because it is the reporter’s core belief that he or she is always asking the right questions. So what do you mean [when you say to us], ‘Are we asking the right questions?’ Our interest is the national interest and our service is the public good. If only the people of whom we’re asking the questions would understand that.’ . . . Who is going to decide what questions get asked next year? Is it the press in response to agendas coming out of the campaign offices? A little of both, or the other way around?”

Lee Hamilton, former congressman from Indiana: “What are the right questions to ask? I put forward two. With regard to foreign policy, every candidate should be pressed on the question of what is the role of America in the world today. . . . People are interested right now in the question of intervention. When do you intervene? How do you intervene? With what tools? With what kind of support? But this really is the key foreign policy question, and every candidate ought to be pressed on it very, very hard.

“The second question that ought to be asked is the great question of American politics, and that is the question that we have wrestled with since the beginning of the country. What is the role of the government? What is the role of the government in meeting important needs of the people? What is the role of the government in providing opportunity for people? What is the role of the government in reflecting the core values of our society? What is the role of the government in curbing the excesses of the marketplace? If you want to understand a candidate, you want to understand how that candidate views the role of the government in American society today.

“The final comment I’d make is that health care bubbles and seethes beneath the surface of all recent political campaigns. It may or may not become the breakout issue in the year 2000. I don’t know. But I certainly see it as a very, very important issue.”

Geneva Overholser, columnist, Washington Post Writers Group: “I think that one of the questions we need to think about is not only what questions are we asking and what issues are we sure are being raised, but what is the tone

of our coverage on all those questions and all those issues. In the seven years I was editor of The Des Moines Register, in the three years I was Ombudsman at the Post, and now as a columnist, when I write about media issues I am struck continually by how powerfully readers feel and viewers feel that we are often out to get somebody and often out to drag down the process. We have all kinds of reasons why we understand that we’ve got to do unpopular things. But I think it is very easy to brush off the powerful feeling that the public has that we’re in fact doing more to harm our democracy than we are to assist it.

“And it’s something we ought to pay more careful attention to, whether we’re talking about personal coverage or issue coverage. I think people are very much interested in individual candidates, in their character, in their personal lives. And I think we’re well advised to do the kinds of profiles we do, even the lengthy ones that we tend to laugh at among one another. Did you see that seven-part eye burner on George W. Bush? But that kind of coverage [is good] as opposed to the kind of an incessant, ‘Did George W. Bush ever snort cocaine?’, the question that dogs him on the campaign when, in fact, we’re the ones who are dogging him on the campaign. And the public is getting this. We are not hiding this from the public.

“Or when we’re covering issues with the kind of lead that says, ‘In a desperate attempt to save his faltering campaign today, Al Gore does this and that.’ I think that this kind of coverage is not only putting people off the political process but holding up an inaccurate mirror and putting people off the media. So it doesn’t serve us terribly well. . . . One of my favorite comments when I was Ombudsman of The Washington Post was from a fellow who said to me, ‘Could you just give us the facts? I can supply the cynicism.’ I think it’s something we all ought to keep in mind.”

Bill Kovach, Nieman Foundation Curator: “One of the most important questions that needs to be asked is the one that journalists ask of themselves: Are they asking themselves the right question about how they cover campaigns and how they deal with the issues that should inform a national election? Former Congressman Dan Rostenkowski, who has had a number of reasons to pay a lot of attention to the way the press covers politicians and politics, made an observation that I think describes the situation very well. He says that what most journalists do not understand is that the

public tends to see all public institutions as sort of similar to one another. The more the press writes about politicians and politics as a corrupt and ineffective public institution, the more the public begins to see the press as an ineffective and perhaps corrupt institution. That's one of the questions we should be asking ourselves. How is our performance not only shaping the agenda of a political campaign but shaping the agenda of how the public looks at journalists and the press and their role in American society?"

At one point during the conference, several commentators went back and forth on this topic.

Judy Woodruff, Anchor and senior correspondent, CNN, and moderator of one panel: "There are very real questions again in this presidential campaign about whether we're doing the right job and whether we're asking the right questions and whether we're representing the people we write for and report for, the public, as well as we should.... But I think that all of us, no matter which direction we come from, whether we're in television or whether we're in print, we do sense that there's something about the system that needs fixing whatever our perspective is."



Photo by Francesca Moisin.

Susan Page, White House Bureau Chief, USA Today: "But you know, Judy, Sheila Tate said that it's up to the press to decide when these [personal] questions get raised. But there is no press to decide. The fact is that even if The Washington Post and The Atlantic and the National Journal and USA Today decided there was a certain sort of question we weren't going to ask, it wouldn't matter. Because Matt Drudge would ask it and talk radio would ask it. And the world of the news media has gotten so that it is not possible for the press to decide not to pursue these questions."

"What I think really has happened is that the public has decided what they are going to discount as issues. We've certainly seen this over and over again with President Clinton where there are issues that we [in the press] see as character issues and explore in great depth and even through impeachment. And the public decided these were not the issues that mattered to them, and they were going to dis-

count them. And that seems to me the reality of the world we're in now. Candidates can choose not to answer questions, and some reporters can choose not to ask them. But at the end it's in the power of the public to decide whether the questions and the answers matter."

Michael Kelly, Editor in Chief, National Journal [now also Editor of The Atlantic Monthly]: "I don't have any complaint with asking specific questions or tough questions. It is of some concern to me, I think, that when you go down this road, and we saw this with the experiment in the last cycle of civic journalism in, I think it was North Carolina. You get into an area where it becomes an obvious question whether or not it is the press's duty and the press's privilege

to decide what the candidate should be running on and what are appropriate and what are inappropriate platforms with which to appeal to voters. I sort of feel that any candidate should be able to run on whatever platform or whatever set of issues that that candidate chooses, including if he chooses to be demagogic."

Judy Woodruff: "So if they want to ignore the savings and loan crisis [that's okay]?"

Michael Kelly: "If they want to ignore it, let them.... And if a reporter wants to haul them up on it, let them. But I get nervous about a prescriptive set of 10 or 20 questions that we're going to ask every candidate. Because then what we're saying is this is what we have decided are the important issues. And I'm not sure where we got that right."

David Broder, columnist, *The Washington Post*: “There’s some variant I think is useful and that we don’t do very often. Which is simply to ask factual questions of candidates.”

Judy Woodruff: “You mean, ‘How do you know about _____?’, those kinds of questions?”

David Broder: “Yeah. I did this on ‘Meet the Press’ with then-Vice President Bush and got thoroughly reamed by Barbara Bush. I asked, ‘How many Americans do you think don’t have health insurance today?’ It’s useful to know what their picture of reality is in the country that they’re attempting to govern.”

In his comments closing the conference, former Washington Post reporter Murrey Marder came up with a few more questions of his own.

“Sitting here and listening to this discussion, I was compelled to think that I could think of a couple more questions that were not asked, which I would like to mention now. Which I think illustrates the possibility that as intensely as we all think we have asked questions, often the most obvious questions never do get asked.

“Some of you will recall that one of the simplest but most penetrating questions for a presidential candidate was once asked by Roger Mudd in questioning Senator Ted Kennedy on live television. It was, ‘Why do you want to be President?’ For moments there was dead silence. The Senator was unprepared for an elementary question and too confounded to improvise. His campaign was devastated right at the outset. I think we should be asking that question again. That basic question. I would certainly like to know from each candidate, to explain in two or three minutes exactly why he or she, of course, wants to be President.

“A related question could be based on the practice of describing the occupant of the White House as leader of the

Western world. This honorific title came out of the Cold War when American nuclear weapons could determine whether many nations would live or die. Today many people of the Western alliance remain very conscious that their fate can still be decided in the White House. If they could ask, I think they certainly want to ask the presidential candidates what I think is about the most humbling question you can ask anybody: ‘What qualifies you to be the leader of the Western world?’ I would love to hear the answers to that question.

“I also would want to know from each candidate, before making any commitment to send U.S. troops abroad, would the candidate as President pledge to give the American

public in advance a full explanation of the pros and cons of the intended troop deployment? I certainly wish that question would have been asked by the press seriously before all of the recent troop commitments abroad, notably in Kosovo. And what is the purpose of freedom of information so far as the American government is concerned? Is he or she prepared for open government and also prepared to seek declassification of the mountains of information withheld from the public on grounds of secrecy decades after any valid reason for secrecy?

“Lastly, as we pile up questions to challenge or stump the candidates we should not, in our zeal to question others, forget that there are also questions that all of us in the print and broadcast press should be asking ourselves. At the end of the day the voters who cast ballots and those who do not are not voting only for candidates for office. They are also casting ballots or not casting ballots, as the case may be,

which express their interest in and their share in our political system. And we in the press have as much of a stake in this system as any candidate does. For if we do not help to explain it accurately, fairly and compellingly, the system cannot sustain itself. For this democracy is participatory in the most literal sense. If we don’t participate it fails. So the stake is as simple as that.” ■



Photo by Nicole Bengiveno/NYT Pictures.

What Would the People Ask?

Andrew Kohut, Director of The Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, addressed the question of ‘What would the people ask?’ by sharing results of a September 1999 survey. In that survey a sample group of Americans was asked to describe what they would like to know—and what they don’t want to know—about the candidates running for President. Their answers are instructive as reporters consider coverage of the campaign.

Views About the Press

Survey participants were asked, “Is press scrutiny of political campaigns worth it?” A 53-36 percent majority endorsed the press’s watchdog role in election campaigns. As Kohut noted in reporting this finding, “That’s a horrible endorsement of this basic function of the press.” By a similar margin, 59 percent to 34 percent, survey respondents said they think editors care more about the opinions of politicians and other political insiders than their own audiences when deciding which stories to cover in an election.

Reporting on the Personal Lives of Candidates

“The public doesn’t want more exposés of the personal lives of candidates and doesn’t want more inside baseball reporting,” Kohut said. “Unlike tabloid audiences, ordinary people are not anxious to pry into the private lives of politicians. In a highly heterogeneous news market, you can’t judge broad public opinion by what makes the needle move on cable chat shows or their print equivalents.”

For example, interest in campaign news dropped from 53 percent in late July to 46 percent in early September following weeks of reporting about George W. Bush’s possible cocaine use. Decline was sharpest among Republicans who normally follow campaign news more than Democrats or Independents.

The Pew Survey tested 13 hypothetical stories about presidential candidates’ personal lives. Clear majorities held the view that the press should report on four of the possible 13 personal issues or situations:

1. Spousal abuse
2. Tax cheating
3. Exaggerating military record
4. Exaggerating academic achievements

The survey revealed similar clarity about what the press should not report:

1. Past drinking
2. Past drug use or use of antidepressants
3. Old affairs
4. Abortions

Assessing the Character of Candidates

“Reporting about personal qualities is a very tricky game for the press in most elections and in this one in particular,” Kohut observed. “On the one hand, Americans say they strongly reject press inquiry into most avenues of a candidate’s life. On the other hand, they place pretty high priority, according to our survey, on knowing certain things about a candidate.”

- Fully 82 percent said it’s very important to learn about a candidate’s reputation for honesty.
- Almost as many, 71 percent, said the same about getting a sense of how well the candidate connects with average people.

Most Americans say they are not as interested in other personal characteristics. Among the personal information they say they are not as interested in knowing is:

- A candidate’s church membership
- A candidate’s clubs and associations
- A candidate’s experiences growing up
- What a candidate’s spouse is like
- Military service (except among men over the age of 50)

They claim to be somewhat more interested in learning about:

- Campaign contributors

Reporting on Campaign Issues

“People say they want to hear about issues,” Kohut said, “...but when no big issues dominate the national conscious-

ness and divide the candidates, the default is personal qualities.”

The survey revealed that Americans want journalists to focus on coverage of issues. However, when respondents were given a list of six or seven issues and asked what they want to see the next President focus on, nearly equal percentages chose many different topics. “None of them overshadows others,” Kohut said, pointing to the top three:

- Shoring up Social Security
- Protecting Medicare
- Keeping the economy strong

Significant mention went to:

- Improving the educational system
- The nation’s moral breakdown
- Improving the health care system

Of 11 issues tested, the survey found only two that people had heard a lot about:

1. The debate over whether U.S. troops should be used to go into another country to stop the killing of innocent civilians in a civil war (This was because of Kosovo.)
2. Health insurance for the uninsured (This was because several weeks prior to the poll Bill Bradley had unveiled his health care proposal.)

When asked, “Which of these issues do you talk about with your friends and family,” other issues rose to the

surface aside from the use of force and the medically uninsured:

1. How to fix Medicare and whether premiums or age eligibility should be increased
2. Whether to put a portion of Social Security funds into the stock market
3. How to make the workplace more flexible for parents
4. How to reduce the gap between rich and poor generally and with regard to school districts in particular

Issues provoking less discussion and having less resonance were ones which people described as having “more interest to Washington elites than ordinary people”:

1. Whether the United States has more of a responsibility than less developed countries to deal with global pollution
2. Whether to ban soft money contributions to political parties
3. How to reform the international financial system to make it more stable
4. How to ensure Internet access for the poor

“Can these issues and others change what appears to be a campaign headed in the direction of a focus on candidates and their personal qualities? I think the answer is maybe,” said Kohut. “There’s at least some hope that if the campaigns or if the media stress issues, then the public will follow. But it’s an environment in which issues will have to be brought to the public. They’re not going to come from the bottom up, with regard to national issues at least.” ■

Are Members of the Press Bored By Issues?

Ron Faucheux, Editor in Chief, Campaigns & Elections: “[Politicians] are not really complaining about the questions the press is asking. What they’re complaining about is that nobody’s covering their answers. And candidates who try to talk about relevant, connected issues are finding it very, very difficult to get that out in the course of a political campaign.

“We have now gone beyond the information age to an entertainment age in which the competitive pressures to entertain people are so great that it’s difficult to do anything else.... When candidates talk about real issues, when there is an encouragement on the part of the media and the civic community for candidates to talk about real issues, when there’s a minimum amount of negativity and when there’s a minimum amount of name-calling, everybody [in the press] sort of throws their hands up and says, ‘This is boring.’ And until the axes start swinging we’re not going to cover it any more....

“At the congressional level, in particular, there is a tre-

mendous amount of frustration in terms of candidates being able to talk about issues, to get across their point of view and to respond with contrary information that is covered outside of a short sound bite or a 30-second ad. Political campaigns in this country are particularly bad forums for the discussions of real issues. And it is no wonder that the connection between that and what happens in government seems to be less and less.”

David Broder, columnist, The Washington Post: “In my experience, every time a reporter comes back from a trip, wherever it may be, the first question that anybody asks in the newsroom is ‘How’s it going? Who’s ahead?’ This is a contest and it’s a race and I think we’d be blinding ourselves to reality if we didn’t recognize this. That doesn’t mean we can’t do other things. But I think we ought to acknowledge that horserace journalism is going to be part, and ought to be part, of what we do.

“There’s room for doing other things. There are questions people legitimately have about the things that government can do that affect their lives directly. Examples at the moment: We know that the boomers are going to be retiring in 10 years. We also know that our retirement and health care system for seniors at this point is a non-functional system. It’s legitimate to ask and push hard for answers from the candidates about what will you do because that issue is going to be on your desk.

“We know that there are unanswered questions on the world scene about what are the ground rules for when the United States intervenes or doesn’t intervene. Legitimate and important to ask the candidates, ‘Do you have some rules that you would apply or would you just deal with every instance on an ad hoc basis as we’ve mostly been doing up to now?’ Those concerns you hear from voters are important cues for us as to what we ought to be asking the candidates about.”

Susan Page, White House Bureau Chief, USA Today: “If you talk about what the role of the media is in a presidential campaign or other campaigns, it’s to raise the issues that the candidates mostly don’t want to talk about. There was an election cycle in which neither candidate in either party wanted to discuss the savings and loan scandal even though that was going to be this huge issue as soon as one or the other of them won the White House. That was a case in which the press did a disservice by not forcing that issue to the forefront.

“One of the ways that you put in their proper context things like these character questions that we talk about so much, or the horserace questions that we get criticized for, is to also cover the policy and substantive questions on which we do the weakest job. The fact is we’re much more delighted to cover the horserace. It’s easier and it’s more fun than covering education policy or what somebody will do about Medicare.

“One problem we have is that once a candidate gives a speech and we cover it on the day when he gives that speech, then it no longer seems like news to us, even though six months will pass before the public is paying the slightest bit of attention. It’ll be news to them up until election day. So if there’s one mission that it seems to me that we ought to really address ourselves to, it’s not to not covering character issues or not covering the horserace but to do a better job on the issues that actually have an impact on people’s lives.”

At one point, Michael Kelly, Judy Woodruff, David Broder and Susan Page engaged in a discussion about how and whether issues get properly covered in the midst of reporting on a campaign.

Michael Kelly, Editor in Chief, National Journal: “Writing a column, I notice all the time that when you set out to learn something about a subject, you go to the clips to get a wide array covering the whole range of the public discussion of the issue. Read through them all and you find at the end of

it that you have no mastery whatsoever of the substance of the issue. All you know is the strategy and tactics politically. You know what reporters think. You know the reason the President or the White House did such and such and the reason the Republicans did such and such. And you know that over and over again....

“There have probably been 500 stories on the senate’s rejection of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Ninety percent of these stories you will find in the mainstream press are strategy and tactics stories and a reader, even a dedicated, intelligent reader, could be forgiven for believing that this entire debate was utterly non-serious on both sides and involved nothing of substance. That it involved on one hand a Republican Congress that wished to give the President a black eye and humiliate him for reasons solely of personal animus. On the other hand, there was a President who was calculating to receive a black eye so that he could gain a campaign issue for his vice president.

“I think that is a message that we are communicating to voters. And one thing we could do is fairly simple: to at least start running some stories in the newspaper about paying attention to the substance of the thing. There’s a real substantive argument about that treaty. There’s a real argument for signing, and there’s a strong, real argument against signing it. That alone would be a step, it seems to me.”

Judy Woodruff, Anchor and senior correspondent, CNN: “David Broder, you’re a close observer of the way we do things in the journalism business. Why don’t we do more of the kind of reporting that Michael is describing? I mean, is somebody telling us not to?”

David Broder: “It’s hard. You have to actually know something to write about what the controversy over the test ban treaty was about. You don’t have to know a hell of a lot about Jesse Helms having one agenda and Bill Clinton having a different agenda. The most useful point about this that I’ve ever come across was in a book written by Jeff Bell, who turns out to have an important part in American political history. By knocking off Clifford Case in a Republican Senate primary in New Jersey he gave us Bill Bradley. And he’s now working for Gary Bauer. But he wrote this little book a few years ago about the elite and the masses. And what he said in that book that I try to remember, not as often as I should, is that the mass of our readers care about what comes out of an election. The elites care about who comes out and how they manage to do it.

“If we could manage to focus ourselves more on what’s at stake in an election, what’s going to come out, rather than the who and the how, then we could probably be of a lot more use to the public.”

Judy Woodruff: “But why don’t we do that, Susan Page? Why aren’t we doing that? Are our editors saying don’t do it, don’t make it serious? Don’t make it substantive?”

Susan Page: “I think it’s just the whole way the system is

set up. It's the way that we've traditionally covered campaigns, which is being on the road with candidates. This doesn't encourage you to do reporting that requires you to know other things or talk to experts. It's our concept of what news is. We think the story that leads the newspaper needs to have a 'yesterday' in it. It needs to be something that has happened, and it needs to have some element of conflict. So and so said yesterday, this was announced yesterday, this train crash happened yesterday.

"But I do think we're in the process to some degree of redefining that and of having more respect for stories that are substantive and stories that are trend stories as opposed to 'this happened yesterday' stories.... If you look in the Pew Center poll, you see what issues are ordinary people versus the elites interested in. You see that ordinary people, whoever they are, I mean, I guess I would put myself in that category, they care first of all about flexibility for working parents. I've got to say that's a big factor in my life. Providing health insurance for all. Medicare reforms. The elites, by the way, are not all interested in those subjects. Those are things that really matter in people's lives.

"And I know that in my paper we make this very conscious effort to try to figure out what matters in people's lives and cover that. We may not do it so well, but we're making an effort to do that. And I guess I do think there's a trend in mainstream journalism toward addressing that and getting away a little bit from some of the 'Who shot John yesterday?' stuff."

Former senator Alan Simpson, Director of the Institute of Politics at Harvard University, addressed some of the journalists' observations.

Alan Simpson: "I think what Michael Kelly said had a lot of heads nodding out in the real world of 'Just tell us about these things.' Who, what, when, how, where, why was what I learned in journalism in Cody [Wyoming] High School. That has to be the guts of journalism. If it's not, then take your damned opinions and put them on the inside of the paper. And take your anonymous sources and stick them somewhere else. Anonymous sources will destroy journalism. And what will destroy politicians is guys who run around saying I want to go off-the-record. No responsible journalist should ever listen to a politician who says 'I want to go off-the-record.'"

Michael Kelly: "There was a small book I read a few years ago called 'News and the Culture of Lying.' It's a quirky, interesting book. And it argued that the fundamental thing that we do, the way that we shape the news as defined by the who, what, when, where, why formula, the ordering of things, is in the best of cases, with the best of intentions, a kind of lie. Because what happens in life really is that every day there is not order but there is chaos. All of this stuff is going on all around the place and a lot of it conflicts with each other and a lot of it doesn't make any real kind of sense.

"The reporter, more than anybody else, knows this, because the reporter gets out of bed and goes out into that chaos and by 5:00 p.m. or earlier has to try to impose some sort of order on it. And there isn't really an order. But there's no other way to do it. You can't call your editor and say, 'You know, it's just a mess out there and it's frankly confusing to me. I don't know what to make of it.' And you can't call your editor and say, 'I know you sent me to the biggest hearing on the Hill today and everybody else is covering it but I have to tell you, the entire thing is a sort of stage show, it's a kind of fraud. It's not real at all and we shouldn't pay that much attention to it.'

"At the time I was reading this book, I was talking to a young reporter who had been sent out to cover a church burning. This was during the spate of stories, the big run of stories, about the burning of African-American churches. And she had been to cover a church that was burned and it was an African-American church. I asked her what she had discovered in her first day going out there, and she said the fire chief said they didn't really know what had happened and they didn't know the cause of the fire and it might be lightning and it might be this, might be that. So he wasn't really sure but there was a lot of emotion there and there were people weeping and there were a lot of people saying that this was part of the sort of national hate spree that we were on, supposedly. And that was what she knew.

"So I said, you have two options. You can call up your editor and say, 'There's a two-paragraph story here saying that there was a fire but we don't know anything about it really.' Or you can lead with a story about people weeping amid the charred ruins of yet another African-American church and say in passing that we don't know that this was a hate crime but tie it into the whole national scene. Which one did she file? It was option B, as it turned out. And this is the nature of our business. And I think this treatise I read had some real truth in it. We see a very complicated world every day. We go to the university, cover a demonstration, and on some level we know that the truth is that there's 200 people demonstrating and they're demonstrating because we're there. There are 10,800 people who are going to class. But we don't file the second story. We file the first story because that's how we define news."

A while later Susan Page returned to this topic.

Susan Page: "The best places to cover a campaign are places where we are increasingly covering campaigns. [At USA Today] we now have a reporter who does nothing but cover campaign money and so do other newspapers. That's not a beat that ever existed before at my newspaper. Now it consumes a person full time. If you're on a campaign, then you tend to go to the rallies and think they matter. You start to think it matters who a candidate's pollster is when frankly I think it matters not at all. And if you're not on a campaign maybe you focus on who is giving money, which is an important issue, or what's happening with the economy and what prescriptions cost. These things are impossible to do if

you're on the road. So maybe the way to cover a campaign is to stay as far away as possible from the campaign."

Judy Woodruff: "David Broder, is that feasible? I mean for news organizations not to send somebody?"

David Broder: "We've got now two polar positions here. Alan Simpson says, 'Just follow the candidate and tell us what he or she is saying.' And Susan Page says, 'Get the hell away from the candidate and find out what's going on.' I think it's useful to do both. I mean, I think we have some obligation to be a transmission belt for these people who are seeking the most important office in the country. But I have to respectfully disagree with my friend, Alan Simpson. Because if you cover the candidates by and large you will hear them saying the same things day after day which they need to do for the sake of repetition and to drive the message home. But it becomes pretty quickly a fairly empty exercise journalistically and I think a not very useful exercise from the public's point of view.

"The missing piece, and the one that I think the Pew survey touches on, the most important players in any election are not the candidates, not the consultants, not even the glorious press. It's the voters. You never make a mistake spending a lot of time listening to what the voters are bringing to the table. They will tell you what the election is about. And they will, most of the time, tell you if you really listen to them, how the election is going to come out."

David Broder revisited whether the press is in any way responsible for why voters do not participate in elections.

Do Members of the Press Try to Set the Policy Agenda?

Lee Hamilton, former congressman from Indiana: "I am impressed about how many people in the media in Washington, D.C. really are not much interested in doing what I at least would consider the basics of journalism, which is to ask questions, to explain, to examine, and to describe. What many are interested in being is a player in the policy game. In other words, they really want to impact policy a lot more than they want to pursue the business of journalism.... It just seems to me today that the news people have become the celebrities in many ways. They want to be policy players."

A little while later, when the discussion turned to how local press covers campaigns, Hamilton described what he regards as its primary role.

Lee Hamilton: "The local press has a real obligation to try to make clear first of all what they think are the major issues

David Broder: "I've made this argument other places. Let me just do it very shorthand. I think we may have contributed to it. I'm not sure. I don't understand entirely why voting has gone down. But the great influence on my generation, the old geezer reporters, was, of course, Theodore White. He showed us with the first 'The Making of the President' book what a compelling story you could tell if you really got inside a campaign. I think for several cycles after that we tried to the best of our ability, which was not great, to get as far inside the campaign as we could. This coincided with the rise of the political consultants. So as we got further and further inside, we got more and more captivated by the evil genius of these people who were managing the campaigns. And I think without intending to we sent the message to the voters, Joe McGinniss's book being the classic example of this, 'You may think you're making a choice, but folks, they're manipulating you.' People don't like to be manipulated. And when they said, 'Hey, politics is all about manipulating us,' the one way you can get yourself free of that manipulation is to get out of voting."

Judy Woodruff: "Can we turn the clock back? I mean, are we too far?"

David Broder: "No, we can't. Again, I keep coming back to the same point. We will not make a mistake for any hour that we spend out talking to voters. We will be in one way or another improving our coverage of what's going on in politics." ■

in that area, not what the candidate thinks but what the press thinks are the major issues. And one of the responsibilities of the press, it seems to me, is to listen in their community, to their readers, so that they make the analysis of what the issues are.

"Candidates believe they know what the issues are. But the candidate's view of what the issues are is usually very strongly colored by the candidate's own political biases or views. So the local press has the obligation to try to understand the whole candidate, both the incumbent and the opponent, and to present that to the constituency of the media as clearly and precisely as they can. I think that's best achieved through very extensive interviewing with the two candidates. I apply that both to television and to the written press and to the extent that they do not do that, then they're falling down on their responsibility, regardless of what the bottom line is. There is a responsibility that the press has,

that the media has, to the public and to the public good. And that responsibility runs far beyond the bottom line and the profit and loss. That responsibility is a key part of representative democracy. It is to make clear to the people what the choices are in a political contest. And a representative democracy doesn't function very well unless the people know the fundamental facts about their candidates....

"I have my own sense of priorities in my congressional district as to what I think is important. I don't think the media should accept that sense of priorities. I think it's your job to push and to probe and to ask me a lot of tough questions, whether I've been in office one term or 15 terms. You have a responsibility to press the candidate. Don't let the candidate control you. Don't let the candidate spin. You should analyze what the problems are in the district and ask that candidate about them and press him very hard, whether he's been there a short time or not."

Gwen Ifill, senior correspondent, "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer" and Moderator of "Washington Week in Review": "But how much of that is the press setting policy?"

Lee Hamilton: "You're asking questions that you think are important. The candidate is responding to your questions. In a sense the press is setting the agenda. But I'm saying I think that's an appropriate role for the press and not to accept the agenda as put forward by the candidate. I don't look upon that as determining policy, however. I think that's a difference."

During the question and answer session, Tom Rosenstiel, Director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, asked panel members to comment on the expertise members of the press bring to the role of being an agenda setter.

Tom Rosenstiel: "If the press is becoming more interpretive, in the sense that reporters are not just writing 'he said yesterday' stories and, as Congressman Hamilton suggests, the press is thereby, in part, setting the agenda with the kinds of questions it asks and the kind of stories it writes, what qualifications does the press have to set the agenda? What expertise? On what basis other than where we are and what we do? What real expertise do we have? And the second part of the question is, how do we establish or how should we establish those expertise and qualifications for the public? Or do they just take them on face value because we are members of the press?"

Lee Hamilton: "With regard to setting the agenda, what qualifications do you have for it? Again my experience is local. But as I went into town after town in Indiana there wasn't any person in the community better positioned to know what was going on in that entire community than the media. If they don't know the problems of the community, I don't know who would. They have a remarkable perspective on what is happening in a community. Now, as the media become more nationwide it becomes a little more difficult. But it seems to me that the responsibility stays the same."

"Likewise, I would think a press person, to be true to the best in journalism, has an objectivity, an independence, that a candidate would not have. So I think your qualifications in setting the agenda are, number one, familiarity with and knowledge of the community and its problems, and number two, a certain objectivity and independence which I would hope you would have."

Geneva Overholser, columnist, Washington Post Writers Group: "I'm a little bit confused in this discussion we've been having about the difference between setting the agenda and making public policy. Obviously they are two different things. And I'm not sure that, Tom, in your question you meant that we present ourselves as being capable of setting public policy. Or are you saying that if in fact what we're doing is affecting the agenda, what gives us the right to do that? I guess I would answer partly that when we are helping set the agenda because we understand what is on the public's mind or in our communities and we know what the community problems are, then that is appropriate. We can let readers know that we feel we've done our homework in doing this. And assure them perhaps of our skills in reaching those conclusions."

"But when we're setting an agenda by what, I think, Gwen Ifill was appropriately calling this soap opera journalism we do—meaning the agenda right now for us is whether George W. Bush snorted coke—then we're setting an agenda that isn't based on expertise. It's based on what we perceive to be the thing that needs to be ferreted out because somebody is hiding it. But I think that's where we go awry. The public is far less intrigued when we do this sort of terrier-holding-onto-the-piece-of-meat number. I think this is one place where we go astray."

Tom Rosenstiel posed another question about whether the press has any responsibility for trying to keep the political playing field level.

Tom Rosenstiel: "This year a lot of people have talked about the return of the smoke-filled room, that the parties, particularly perhaps the Republican Party, has tried to preset the election before voters have had a chance to be involved. To some degree some have argued that the press has been complicit in this by covering the internal workings of the campaign more. I guess the question is, to what extent should the press feel an obligation to involve voters, to engage voters, to increase participation? To what extent should we be keeping the playing field level for all of the candidates until the primaries are underway? Is that an obligation that we have? Is that part of our responsibility?"

David Broder, columnist, The Washington Post: "For better or worse we have to try to deal with reality. Alan Keyes is not George W. Bush. There's just no way to pretend that those are on a par. Doesn't mean you don't cover what Alan Keyes does or says, but it would be ridiculous to try to say that the press is going to serve as the equalizer among candidates. There is no screen for anybody to get through to

become a presidential candidate. All you've got to do is say, 'I'm a presidential candidate.' And we'd be damn fools if we treated them all as if they were the same person."

Tom Rosenstiel: "I think that to the extent that we, especially early on, focus our stories around things such as fundraising, strategy, horserace, those play to the strengths of the front-runner. And they reinforce the weaknesses of the laggards. If you were to cover how people make decisions, their record, the kind of staff people they have around them, that's an area in which everybody is equal. Everybody has those things. And I'm not sure what the answer is. I myself don't know what the answer to my first question is. But I think that we do make choices here in our coverage. To the extent that we cover things that accentuate who's ahead by their nature, while we can't ignore those things, we may increase the public anger towards the press because we're shutting them out, we're not writing to them."

Susan Page, White House Bureau Chief, USA Today: "One thing that sort of relates to the question you raise is, after each presidential election I realize all the very stupid mistakes I made during the previous one. At the end of the 1992 election one of the mistakes I felt I had made was not paying enough attention to candidates who I thought didn't have a chance to win. And it was true they didn't have a chance to win but they had a lot to do about shaping the debate. Paul Tsongas. I didn't think he really had a chance, and I didn't pay too much attention to him. But his voice had a big impact on the conversation that the candidates who did have a chance to win had. The same was true with Ross Perot. The degree to which the subject of the conversation is covered as opposed to the horserace gives candidates who are not leading in fundraising or leading in the polls a better chance to have their voices heard and to be treated in a serious and appropriate way." [See related story on page 37.] ■

Is Getting Personal the Same as Probing Character?

David Broder, columnist, The Washington Post: "The harder part is how we can help voters figure out who the hell these candidates really are and how they might operate. I think we've slowly gotten better at probing those questions. And while it verges on the personal, it's important to know what kind of family forces shaped these people. If somebody has grown up in a dysfunctional family, that's going to affect the way that they behave. You don't have to look any further than the examples of Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich to see how that can change politics and policy in the country. But it's also important for us, and I think it's something we're capable of doing without pretending to be psychiatrists, to find out about what their peer relationships have been, what their relationships with their staffs have been over the years.

"One thing that I'm engaged in is trying to get these candidates for President to talk about what they've learned or sensed about the relationship between Presidents and Congresses. It's been a perpetual problem for every recent President. 'What have you learned from that?' I was down asking Governor Bush that question last week, asking him about what he took away from watching his father struggle with Congress. Those are things that are not intensely personal but maybe will give people clues as to who these people really are and how they might function in the office."

Judy Woodruff, Anchor and senior correspondent, CNN: "Alan Simpson, would you agree that it is important for the press to look at the family background, closely deeply at the family background of these candidates? That it does matter whether they've had, whether you call it a dysfunctional

family or whatever, and we do need to know their personal relationships with staff and others to see how they interact with people? Are these important?"

Alan Simpson, former senator, Director of the Institute of Politics at Harvard University: "I think, Judy, the term is 'closely deeply.' What is 'closely deeply'?... Steve Brill made the comment that there are many media sources who have spent thousands of dollars and man and woman hours in Odessa, Texas with somebody who's a drug counselor hoping and praying they can find the person who counseled George W. Bush if he had this problem. In my mind this a total waste of energy and human endeavor. But that's my view and that's only because I was on federal probation for shooting mailboxes and slugged a cop in Laramie. And I think those things should go unwritten, for God's sake.

"But they looked all over for that when I ran, so I put it out there first. And Dick Cheney, when he went through his confirmation, had a DUI when he was at the University of Wyoming. He told Sam Nunn, if you're going to bring that up I'm going to bring it up first. So it's easy to talk about all that stuff when you're out there in the fourth estate, but how would you feel if it were happening to you? And that's the difference. I think it's absurd to dig deeply into the life of a person who is 50 years old about what they did when they were 18 because everybody in this room will flunk that test. So what is the purpose of that? The public perceives it as banal and offensive and puerile. And when they see the person from the media asking that question they think the guy's a jerk. And their question immediately in their own

head is, ‘What did you do?’ That’s where [Bill] Bradley unnerved the whole crew [on a Sunday morning interview show] when he turned to the bunch and said, ‘Did you ever smoke pot?’”

Susan Page, White House Bureau Chief, USA Today: “One of the legacies of the Monica Lewinsky controversy or scandal is that Americans hope to have a President that they know a lot less about, a lot less about his or her personal life. And I think a lot of reporters feel that way, too. For various reasons, and some of them quite legitimate, we explored in great detail the most personal details about President Clinton, more than we wanted to know....”

“I think you do have the standard of showing the relevance to his performance in office. So for instance, if you think a person had a dysfunctional family life growing up, that’s relevant only if you’re sure it relates to his ability to lead or to relate to Congress or to act in an honorable way. In itself, it seems to me that it’s not an appropriate subject to pursue in great depth.”

Michael Kelly, Editor in Chief, National Journal: “In 1992, when candidate Bill Clinton was confronted with Jennifer Flowers and with the draft issue, what was interesting to reporters covering him was not the specifics of either one of those alleged misdeeds. It was the mounting evidence, and evidence that mounted bit by bit and more by more over time and got quite serious, that in this candidate for the presidency you had a person who had an unusual relationship with the business of telling the truth. A person who was unusually willing in his answers to these issues to go much further than most people would in flatly denying things, to play games with the truth and with the semantics and so on, that was unusual. And I think reporters got a sense that this said something important in a fundamental, deep and important way about this person and what sort of President he might be, something that mattered.

“We more or less dropped it or it dropped itself or something. At any rate things went on. And we eventually got to the point where I think it became clear to a lot of people that this issue that people first suspected in 1992 was in fact core, that this was core to the whole presidency, the entire being of Bill Clinton as President. And it mattered a great deal, as we saw last year, in terms of what happened directly in his presidency. But we have taken away from that a kind of unthinking impulse that because the externalities of something might be the same, that we are obligated to somehow pay intense scrutiny to this sort of character issue, as we call it in shorthand, any time it arises. Did so and so use cocaine? Did so and so once have a run-in with the law? Is so and so divorced? Did so and so commit adultery?”

“These things, in and of themselves, probably don’t matter. They don’t matter in the overwhelming majority of cases. The only times they do matter is when you have reason to think, from evidence, and I suppose even to some degree from gut instinct, that you’re dealing with somebody whose character is fundamentally flawed. Flawed in such a way that it actually is a job performance issue, that it would matter as

to what sort of President that person would become. This is simply not the case, it seems to me, in the huge majority of these cases. If a certain candidate for the presidency went through a period of drug use or anything like that or infidelity in marriage or something 20 years ago, X number of years ago, in and of itself I don’t see that as something that perhaps we should report.”

Judy Woodruff: “Who is to determine who has a flawed character?”

Michael Kelly: “I’m perfectly willing to concede, having raised this point, that the divining of when something is appropriate to raise, when it does rise to this fundamental level, is perhaps an impossible question to answer. But I think we should at least be thinking about it....”

David Broder: “I think [I know] the way in which we can perhaps deal with this iffy kind of, this murky area that Michael Kelly was talking about. If we start with the public record and the public activities of public people, then we see what questions those raise. I’ll give an example. There was a presidential candidate a few cycles ago about whom I was writing a profile. I did what I normally do, which is say, ‘Whom should I talk to? Who are your friends in town?’ He mentioned Senator Dale Bumpers as one of his close friends. I went to see Bumpers and Bumpers said, ‘Why are you asking me about him?’ And I said, ‘Because he told me you’re one of his closest friends.’ He said, ‘He said that?’ That told me something about the character of the relationships that this particular candidate had or didn’t have.

“And that’s what leads you into saying what it is about this candidate that would make his relationships with political peers so attenuated as they are. And that’s important for a President because a President only gets stuff done by being able to persuade other politicians that it’s worth doing.”

Later, in an exchange with Nieman Curator Bill Kovach, David Broder touched again on this topic.

David Broder: “I’ve just started this most recent round of voter interviewing for our paper. And I don’t want to be held to this if [what happens in the future] gives me some reason to reconsider. But what I’ve heard so far suggests to me that old-fashioned character questions are going to be very important this time around. I think the suspicion or the fear that some people had, that because the public didn’t want Bill Clinton thrown out of office that therefore character issues were not important, I think that’s probably going to turn out to be a misjudgment. I think what I’m hearing is American people want a damn near ironclad guarantee they won’t be embarrassed again by a President, that they won’t have the painful experience trying to explain to their children what these stories about the President are really about.”

Bill Kovach: “How does the press do that without probing so deeply into the personal experience of a candidate that they draw the public criticism they draw when they do

that? I mean, the Pew survey says voters are interested in character but not in personal behavior so much. In [The Washington Post's] Charles Krauthammer's column the other day, a person says, 'I'm a former psychiatrist and I can tell you that no matter how many hours I spend with a person probing their innermost secret I really don't know them.' So how does a journalist fill that void?"

David Broder: "I think we can, as reporters, explore the character of their relationships, particularly with their political peers. I'm fascinated by and I have yet to read a clear explanation about how Steve Forbes runs Forbes magazine. If he's going to run the country, then I'd like to know something about how he runs Forbes magazine. That's not probing into his private life. But it might actually give you a clue as to what his pattern at least of management would be that he would bring to the White House."

Alan Simpson: "I think instead of the word 'character,' I'd use 'integrity.' Maybe they shouldn't be in juxtaposition. But if you have integrity, nothing else matters, and if you don't have integrity, nothing else matters. And I think that's where people are going this time...."

"I just say [about the press coverage], how deep do you go? When Judy Woodruff started [talking about this], the word was how 'closely' or how 'deeply.' And I'm just saying that if you as a craft want to go deeper, the American public will not be going with you. Because every single one of them has had something happen to them which they choose to leave out of their life. And it's deep. Stuff that can mess up their marriages, can mess up their relations with their kids or their boss. And they don't want that to come out. So why do they want to watch this futile exercise? You keep doing it, deep or shallow or whatever, and the American public will just turn you off."

Bill Kovach: "I agree. And I agree with what David Broder said. That's the conundrum. If the public wants a leader who is not going to embarrass them, but the public has no idea what these presidential candidates have in their personality and in their character, then how does the press help them come to the judgment that they are choosing the right person who is not going to embarrass them? That's the problem we've got to solve."

Susan Page: "I agree with something Senator Simpson said, which is that there should be some kind of standard of relevance to the office [for us] to explore personal behavior or questions of character. I do think you could do something at 18 that doesn't really reflect on your character or your integrity as an adult whereas if you did it at age 30 it's very relevant. And all the people who run for President have long careers, many of them in public life, lots of areas to explore how they behave. Whether they behaved with integrity, whether their peers trusted them, whether they misled the people they were representing. And that's all totally fair game to cover. And it's not that there's a bright shining light that tells you when it's appropriate to cover and when it's

not. But I think that is a general guideline that would be very useful for reporters to follow."

Bill Kovach: "David Broder, anything to add?"

David Broder: "Just to underline Susan's last remark. There is so much that's accessible to us if we just do the reporting in their public lives. We ought to pretty well mine that before we decide we've got to go beyond that. The presidency, particularly, is an office that functions, if it functions at all, on the basis of the person in that office being able to establish relationships of trust and persuasion with other politicians and the public. The campaign itself is a good test of public persuasiveness. But we are better positioned than most individual voters are to be able to write about what those who have dealt with this person over the years in public roles have concluded about this person."

"...[A]s one who dismissed much too readily the view of Clinton that was developed over many years by the Arkansas press corps that dealt with him, I would not want to make that mistake again of ignoring sometimes the very different view that politicians have in their home states." ■



Photo by Doug Mills, courtesy of AP Wide World Photos.

How Do Editors Decide What Political Stories to Cover?

By a margin of 59 percent to 34 percent, participants in Pew Center survey said they think editors care more about the opinions of politicians and other political insiders than their own audiences when deciding which stories to cover in an election.

During the Watchdog Journalism Conference, several speakers explained how they make decisions about coverage.

Mike Pride, Editor, the Concord (N.H.) Monitor: “We have a lot of presidential candidates come into our area for three and four days and we attempt to cover them whenever they’re in our circulation area.... You can imagine what it would be like for our readers if we just sent a reporter out and said, ‘Write down what the candidates say, who they meet with, and what kind of interaction they have with people.’ If John McCain comes to our area for three days and talks to five or six different kinds of groups, then the kind of coverage we would be giving them would be the same story three days in a row, or basically the same kind of story.

“Now, reporters certainly can’t ignore what happens on the campaign trail. But you need to shape that campaign coverage in a way that’s going to make the most of your reporters’ access to the candidate. When John McCain came on one particular trip he was attempting to, shall we say, retool his abortion position, and this seemed like an important thing for our reporter to focus on. This was not what John McCain was focusing on when he came to talk to the Rotary Club and the veterans’ groups and the other people in town. We managed to get some access to McCain on that particular day and wrote a story that was focused almost entirely on his effort to switch his position on abortion and how that was playing with the public, by talking to the people who came to the event.

“The next day he was speaking to a veterans’ group. What we decided to focus on was his effort to fold his war hero status into his candidacy. To what degree was his candidacy going to be based on his war hero status? And how was this playing with the public? What was it about McCain’s military experience, his experience as a POW, that people might look at and say, this is what qualifies him for President? That was the focus of that day’s story. That wasn’t all that John McCain did that day. Our coverage wasn’t following him one place after another through his day.

“So that gives you an idea of the way we approach campaign coverage.... We definitely do sit back in the office and try to figure out how we ought to cover these people. We don’t sit back in the office and say we ought to send our reporters out wherever they are and write down whatever they do and put it in the paper.”

Ray Suarez, senior correspondent, “The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer”: “When a campaign is thinking heavily about whether the candidate should wear bone or khaki chinos and choosing what kind of Timberland boots the candidate is going to wear to the berry pie supper because it makes a good picture for the front page or that night’s evening news, reporters think that they will up the ante and be smarter than that and not fall for the Timberlands and the chinos and the berry pie. So they are going to ask the zinger. So campaigns then cover up more and try to control how much line they let out and what they say and how they’re going to say it.

“So you’ve got a sort of arms race of declining information going on. Speculation in the absence of information generated in frustration by reporters who don’t find campaigns communicative or real. Then in the response to that hit piece, campaigns cover up more and only let reporters talk to candidates in front of just folks, which makes them seem petty, stupid and like a pack of braying hounds. Then you see that on television and people say, ‘God, what a bunch of jerks.’ There are two sides in this dance, and they’re both busily stepping on each other’s feet. It’s not just one side or the other.”

Geneva Overholser, columnist, Washington Post Writers Group: “The abortion story is important locally and nationally, Mike. If your reporter presses him and he changes and it becomes clear why he’s changed or how much he’s changed or whatever on abortion, that’s an important national story. But you also obviously are thinking about what your readers need to know about McCain, the people who didn’t talk to him at each of those gatherings where he went. How do you balance those two needs? I think that’s part of what Congressman Hamilton was talking about when he said members of the press want to be part of policymaking. In a sense your reporters are pressing McCain because you feel that we need to know what he thinks on abortion. But that responsibility is set against what your readers just need to know broadly about McCain. Most of your readers would probably say, I’m more interested in the whole picture of things about McCain than I am in you pressing him on abortion.”

Mike Pride: “I’m trying to say if my readers had access to John McCain during the last two days in the paper, what they’ve read is McCain flip-flopping a little bit on abortion. That’s something they want to know about. That’s a very current issue, and it’s an important issue to all my readers as well as to the political process. So to me the most important issue in trying to shape this kind of coverage is access. If you can get your reporter 20 minutes with McCain to talk with him about abortion, during his campaign day in which he doesn’t have any scheduled stops at which he’s going to talk about that subject, then you can therefore advance the story. But you also find out what it is that the people he’s speaking with think about this issue and how this is going to play out in the campaign. To me, that’s really the way to do it....”

“We’re going to see John McCain 30 or 40 times during this campaign. I think we’ll be able to cover everything that he says. And I also believe very strongly that our coverage has to cover the stump speeches. The stump speeches are really important in campaign coverage. And I think they’re often overlooked. Often you read a story about inside baseball on the day that the stump speech is made. So something that we also really, really focus on is what the candidates actually say. We don’t ignore that. It’s just that if you’re going to be covering a candidate for three days in a row you’d better figure out a way to focus those stories on issues or the stories are not going to be read. And you’re not going to be doing what you’re supposed to doing, which is standing for the readers and giving them information about what matters to them.”

Gwen Ifill, senior correspondent, “The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer” and Moderator of “Washington Week in Review”: “We find ourselves in this interesting position of attempting to put the news in context. Do not think for a minute that the news you read in your newspaper or you see on your television is decided by the person you see telling it to you or the byline on the story. It’s decided by a whole set of complex factors. Geneva touched on it briefly when she talked about the corporate nature and the competitive nature of television news and certainly newspapers. Ratings are driving a lot of that. But also there’s something else driving it.... There are people of goodwill and good journalistic integrity who are attempting to tell the story more

interestingly, who are attempting and sometimes failing to tell you something that you didn’t know before and put that personality in some sort of context. So that you understand a little bit more about who it is you’re talking about, not just ‘He believes these five things which we told you about yesterday.’ Let’s tell you about him or her. Sometimes we do that really clumsily. And sometimes we do it in an enlightening way. And sometimes it leads us to another story.”

On a related topic, Geneva Overholser talked about how confusion can arise in the public’s mind when the press fails to differentiate between what is reported as fact and what is integrated into the story as judgment or analysis by the writer.

Geneva Overholser: “We could certainly say it’s our responsibility to let the public know about a candidate who cut a midnight deal. Those are all pieces of information that

we have decided we can and need to give readers in order to help them really understand a candidate. My problem with that is when we start putting it in the lead instead of saying first here’s what happened. I can’t tell you the number of times when I was the Ombudsman at The Washington Post, I’d have readers call and say, ‘I had to go to the jump to see what this bill said.’ I mean, [the story says] it got introduced at the midnight hour in response to this kind of debate because this

candidate has this problem or this politician has this problem. Readers don’t find out what it is or what it might do for them until they get to the jump.

“Part of what we need to do is recognize that readers don’t understand that we’ve changed these rules about whether we separate news and opinion. We’re not nearly as clear as we sometimes think we are about labeling an analysis story. We sort of do it oddly in the [Washington] Post and the [New York] Times.... I ask you to think about this when you look at the coverage. You’ll see an analysis slug on some stories that are less egregiously opinionated, in my view, than on some of the straight news stories. We need to give people the facts and we need to tell them what we, quote, really think is going on. But we need to separate the two, or at the very least put the facts up higher and our opinion about what’s behind this lower in the story.” ■



Photo by Greg Behar/U.C. Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, Center for Photography.

How Does Television Affect the Coverage of Political Campaigns?

Sheila Tate, President, Powell Tate, and former press secretary: “I’ve had the field producer for a major network come to me in September of the election year and say, ‘George Bush will not be on our network tonight because he didn’t throw red meat.’ This meant he didn’t attack Michael Dukakis. He gave a significant speech on education. [And] at that point in the campaign it was vitally important to be on television every night.

“Actually it’s even important what your place is on the show. It affects numbers. It’s just bizarre but it does. And so it doesn’t take more than a few episodes like that to realize that the candidate is being told by television, ‘If you want to be on, start throwing the red meat. Start attacking because you’re not going to be on otherwise.’ And then you might not get elected and you might not have a chance to put all these policies into effect. It’s an ugly process. It really is. I wouldn’t want to go through it again, frankly. Television has an enormous amount of power over elections.”

Judy Woodruff, Anchor and senior correspondent, CNN: “I certainly can’t speak for all of television, but clearly that has been and continues to be a real problem for those of us in television who cover politics. In the heat of the presidential campaign, when we’re vying to see who gets on the air, unless you work specifically for a political program like ‘Inside Politics’ you’re competing with everything else going on in the world and you are concerned about keeping an audience. And those are very real concerns.”

Susan Page, White House Bureau Chief, USA Today: “We’ve got a presidential candidate now in Bill Bradley who’s trying not to follow the traditional way of getting attention. Gore makes a charge, and he declines to respond. He’s going about this his own way and a different way than throwing red meat. We’ll see. I mean, he’s had some success so far, unexpectedly. We’ll see how he does. I wonder also—while television is, of course, enormously powerful—if the profusion of outlets both on cable and C-SPAN and the Internet don’t dilute that somewhat and make it less impor-

tant what one field producer for one network can do, even if it’s one of the three major networks. It seems to me that the ability they had in 1980, for instance, to really just hold in the palm of their hand a great portion of the American audience is now diminished. That hand is open now, and there are a lot of different places that matter.”

Michael Kelly, Editor in Chief, National Journal: “I wanted to pick up on a point about this power of television and its power to shape campaigns and so on. I think that’s true. But I think one reason it is true or one thing that’s happened that

I’d love to see changed in print coverage, in writers’ coverage of presidential elections. It seems to me as if at times we in the writing business have, in covering things that happen, whether it’s politics or in war, that we have almost made some kind of collective decision that television does that job of describing for us. That the camera is so much better at capturing the physicality of something, the event, its reality, that a writer’s chief job is not to describe it, not to paint a picture, a narrative in the way that writers used to. I think this is wrong. I think the camera does not tell the

truth, and a writer’s nuanced description can much better capture the truth.

“If you ask the question about why people tune out what we do and why they’re not focused, I think our abandonment of that kind of reporting—our self-conscious narrative descriptive coverage of an event, whether it be political or something else—by a good feature writer in the local paper, robs our readers of a lot of the pleasure of reading about politics. When you hear Alan Simpson talk about the political scene that he’s been part of, there’s a real texture there. And there’s a real sort of vibrant joy and even savage joy to politics. There’s a lot of pleasure in this. We used to have, I think, more writers who understood that part of the business, not the whole business, but part of the business of writing about politics was in a sense to be a dispatch writer. Like you were out covering a war. And to file that kind of evocative textured writing. A certain restoration of that might restore some public interest.” ■



Cartoon by David Horsey. Reprinted with permission, Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

What Are the New Challenges in the Wake of New Technologies?

Bill Kovach, Curator, Nieman Foundation: “We have created a communication system with the new technology during the last two decades in which it looks as though we’re creating new classes of information-rich people. We have an older generation that gets most of its political news off of television. I think we’ve had enough surveys to convince us that most of the political information that the broad public get is from television.

“And we have a younger generation that increasingly is getting much of its information off of the Internet. And we have a ruling elite that knows neither of those two worlds. The people who run the economic institutions and the political institutions of this country don’t watch television and they don’t surf the Internet. So there’s an information gap between these three groups of people. And I don’t know how we begin to figure how the press fills those gaps and communicates between those groups of people. A survey like the one conducted by Pew could perhaps be affected by the fact that significant groups of people have significantly different information pools, so that no issue is going to gather a significant group of people.”

Andrew Kohut, Director, The Pew Research Center for The People & The Press: “There’s no question that there’s more diversity in the way people get their news now than there was 10 years ago, 20 years ago. This particular survey shows a dramatic increase in the percentage of people who say they principally rely on the Internet for national and international news. At the beginning of the year we asked that question and found six percent of the respondents saying that’s how they primarily got their news. In our September survey it was 11 percent. So the Internet is coming on very fast. If you look at the people who use the Internet for news, their interests aren’t materially different and their levels of engagement aren’t materially different than that of people who don’t use the Internet, and this is because of two countervailing forces.

“One, they’re better educated. This would lead them to know more about issues and care more. But on the other hand, they’re younger. And the biggest difference, the biggest factor that separates those who are engaged and those who are disengaged, is age. The youngest generation, Generation X, and the younger element of the baby boom generation are generations that haven’t had the news habit nearly to the degree that older generations have and haven’t participated in voting and other civic ways that these previous generations do. So you don’t see an enormous difference between the Internet audience and the general news audience at this point.”

Gwen Ifill, senior correspondent, “The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer” and Moderator of “Washington Week in Review”: “When we talk about the press we fall into kind of old-fashioned notions of what the press is, as if we all speak with one voice and cover things the same way. As somebody who’s spent 15 years in print and only the last five or so years in television, I’m here to tell you that there is a dramatic difference in the way print and television cover the same events. And it’s changed dramatically in the last five years in television. The advent of all-news or so-called all-news cable networks has really changed the way the debate is driven. And if you’re a responsible viewer or reader you have to know that there are lots of places to get your information. The Internet didn’t exist in the way it does five years ago. And newspapers didn’t cover things with the variety that they do right now.

“You can pick up The Washington Post and read a seven-part profile of George W. Bush, but you’ll also read the stories that begin, ‘In a blow to his faltering campaign....’ You have it all. But the biggest problem is the fact that so much of our coverage in politics and everything else is being driven by the soap opera mentality. The idea that there has to be a running story and that every night there’s got to be a snapshot with a punchy question in which somebody has to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and that’s all there is to it. That doesn’t really bring enlightenment. I’m not even sure it brings viewers. But it’s part of the way that we cover the news now. And it’s not changing. We’re not going backward. We have to figure out a way in our responsible coverage to integrate the fact that people are getting their news a lot of different ways, and they’re asking questions in a lot of different ways. And ways which are not satisfying to journalistic purists but also may not be satisfying to people who would much rather be watching a rerun of ‘Friends.’ So that’s just a challenge that we kind of have not only in this year and not only in politics, but in everything we cover.”

Lee Hamilton, former congressman from Indiana: “One of the questions I repeatedly got in town meetings in Indiana was, ‘Congressman, what can I read that will give me the truth?’ I think Gwen Ifill has the right answer. There isn’t any one thing you can read that can give you the truth. You just have to consult multiple sources to try to understand the complex problems that we have around us today. And you’ve got to figure out that almost every source has their own bias, has their own perspective on the problem. What this means is that the citizen in a democracy in a representative government has a very heavy burden. It is the citizen’s job to sort through all of these sources of information to try to find out the truth.”

Geraldine Ferraro, former vice presidential candidate and former CNN political commentator: “Here comes the cynic again. I think both of you are presuming that we’re talking about an educated consumer and somebody who has also a lot of time to get the information. I don’t think that’s a given.... I’m not saying it’s because they’re not smart enough. I’m saying it is because in some instances people are too busy, in some instances people don’t have the money to buy the three or four newspapers that a lot of us who live in big cities buy every day. And so I think those are all pieces that aren’t there, which then makes your responsibility even



Photo © Colin Franzen/U.C. Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, Center for Photography.

greater. Because if you’re not giving it to them straight, if you’re expecting them to go from place to place, it’s not being done.”

During the second panel, focusing on the presidential campaign, no mention was made of the role the Internet is playing in election coverage. Kathryn Kross, a producer with ABC News’s “Nightline,” introduced the subject with a question to the panel members.

Kathryn Kross: “Interesting that the Internet hasn’t come up. And I am wondering for the journalists on the panel how the Internet changes what you do and how you do it. Especially assuming that we’re moving towards a situation where news organizations can track politicians, their records, their stances. Like Steven Brill said, ‘You can have a yes, no and wouldn’t answer kind of column.’ How does that change what we do and how we do it?”

Susan Page: “It’s such a huge resource for voters or people who are interested. I mean, now they don’t need to hear an account of what a politician said in a speech. They can go online and read the speech or even hear the speech. It acts as kind of a safeguard against misquoting somebody. About two years ago I pulled a Newt Gingrich quote out of a wire story and put it in a story. I must have gotten 15 calls from people who had read it on the wire or read it on the

Web and felt it wasn’t fair, that it had been pulled out of context. I think in that way it’s incredibly useful. I think it changes to some degree what it is we do. Because the things that we go out and cover that used to be exclusively ours now belong to everybody.”

Michael Kelly, Editor in Chief, National Journal: “...it has already pretty much destroyed the old media’s ability to serve as a filter, to decide what is and is not fit to print and fit to air. ...Susan’s other point about the information, it’s extraordinary the way this has changed everything. It’s changed what it means to be a reporter.

“I was doing a column a while back on proposed regulation to change federal banking regulations. I think it was called the ‘Know Your Customer Act.’ Should have been the ‘Big Brother Act.’ It was a proposed regulation to tell banks across the country that they had to file with the federal government a whole set of personal information about their customers, beyond the stuff we have now, if there’s a \$10,000 withdrawal. The federal agency put up the proposed regulation change and all of the supporting documents on its Web site as a public service during the comment period. This agency told me they usually get 250 to 300 comments. This time various talk radio hosts and organized groups and so on found it on the Web page and sent it all over the Internet. They got 11,000 comments. All but one was negative and this wasn’t brought to them courtesy of any of us. It was just out there. And they had to scrap the regulation. That kind of thing has changed all the dynamics.”

Judy Woodruff, Anchor and senior correspondent, CNN: “Hasn’t it in a way made the news media more important from the standpoint that somebody’s got to be going through this massive list of comments, issues, whatever and deciding this may be more important? You may argue that we may not be the ones who should be fulfilling that function, but otherwise the public is faced with unfiltered news. Is that OK? Maybe that is OK.”

David Broder, columnist, The Washington Post: “Some people want it sorted for them and some people want to do the sorting for themselves. There are plenty of shortcomings in the press or the media, some of which we’ve touched on here today. The great boon is, and I see it in my reporting when I’m out of this city, you can go into any community of any size now in America and you will find a self-selected group of people who are every bit as well attuned to what’s going on in public affairs and every bit as well informed as anybody you’d run into at The Brookings Institution or Heritage Foundation. They’re with it. For them this is a golden age because you’ve got the Internet, you’ve got NPR, you’ve got cable news channels. You’ve got C-SPAN. You’ve got three national newspapers that we never had through most of our history, two of which happen to be among the very best papers in the country and USA Today is week by week a better and more serious paper than it was the week before. It’s a great time for people who want to be informed.” ■

Yes or No? Keeping a Candidate Scorecard

Steven Brill, Publisher of Brill's Content, told conference participants what he would do to keep candidates accountable and the public interested in coverage of issues.

Bill Kovach asked me to think about what, if I had a staff at a newspaper or a local news organization, a local television news organization, or a national television news organization, covering an election campaign, what are some of the things I would do.

The first thing I'd do is I'd make sure that they have more time, more space, and more resources to cover it than most of the people representing news organizations in this room, I suspect, will have. In a world in which the JonBenet story is bigger news than a coup involving a budding nuclear power, we in this room are not the problem. And no amount of great ideas that we come up with here will be as significant as a decision by the people who control news organizations to let us cover real news. On the other hand, I do think there is a way we can package political news, issues news even, and make it more aggressive. There's a way that will give it a better audience and therefore make it more competitive with JonBenet in the marketplace. I really believe that.

I'd make sure that if a congressional candidate is a businessperson that we did an in-depth profile of how that person runs and has run that business. From labor policy to consumer pricing policy, to how the business was financed at the beginning to complaints about the business, to good things the business has done to the business's community involvement before the candidate decided he was going to be a candidate, I'd take a very good look at that person's record as a businessperson.

If the candidate is an incumbent I would want a story and a chart that we would run matching the candidate's votes to campaign contributors who had an interest in that vote. In fact, if I was covering legislative politics, state or federal, any time there was a congressional vote, any time, I would match the vote with a listing of who cast that vote based on the percentage of campaign contributions the person got from an interested party in that vote. Until the system is changed, I would always link campaign contributions to a vote.

What that means is if somebody voted in a way that was against the obvious interests of significant contributors to his or her campaign, I'd say that. I wouldn't just say the negative. I'd say the positive also. But I would always, always make that an issue. No story I ever did about anybody's decision in Congress or in a state legislature would be without some mention of how that vote might tie into campaign contributions. Let people complain about that. Let them say it's obvious. Of course it's obvious that people

will contribute to congresspeople or representatives who vote their way. You don't have to tell your readers that, it's obvious. And I'd say let's just keep it obvious....

You can pick through this suggestion and figure out all different kinds of problems with it. How will you know which interest is which? How will you know how to do the percentages? How will you know how to do the amounts? But you get the point. The point is since in the real world in Washington, D.C. votes are linked to campaign contributions, at a minimum there is an appearance of conflict of interest. It seems to me that one way to package and cover politics is to record that and record it very specifically.

I also believe deeply in asking candidates, asking anybody, specific questions that have a yes or no answer, then running a chart that lists the candidates' positions based on those yes or no answers. If somebody won't answer "yes" or "no," you have another box that says, "Won't answer." Maybe the icon you use for that is a chicken or something. But you spruce this up. You package it and make not answering yes or no a real issue.

Frankly, I think a lot of the political reporting, a lot of the interviews with candidates, tend not to frame questions that can get real yes or no answers. The fact is people have to make decisions ultimately based on yes and no. That's how they vote in Congress or in a state legislature, that's how Presidents make decisions. And there is nothing wrong with asking questions that way. There is something wrong with letting candidates get off with flowery statements that mean nothing and bore voters. Indeed, that might turn off your readers or your viewers to the campaign coverage because the statements are meant to obfuscate things. They're meant to turn people off.... My point is that there ought to be boxes in newspapers, graphics on television, that tell us whether candidates are answering questions and when they say "yes" and when they say "no." Then you can develop a package that contrasts candidates' answers to very specific questions. There isn't nearly enough of that going on right now....

What I'm saying is that I think politicians running for office ought to be held to that test. There is a way to frame questions that is fair. And now that we have the Internet there is a way to let people who are interested know the details of how you're framing questions. Longer answers that people give behind their yes or no can be provided easily. There's a way to expand this package. I think that one of the problems is we're letting people off too easily with non-answers. So I would do that.

Would I run horserace stories? Of course I would. Because I think how a candidate runs a campaign has a whole lot to do with how a candidate would hold office. Particularly somebody running for an executive office. Managing a campaign in microcosm is often a good view of how that person would run the executive branch, whether it's a statehouse or the White House....

Similarly, I would run lots of stories about the candidates' ads, and I'd apply the resources to fact check those ads. And I'd keep a box score on accuracy of the ads, call them as I see them. There are certain things that are factually incorrect that you can say, "That's incorrect," and you don't simply have to raise questions about it.

Would I run polling stories? Sure I would, but not nearly as many. Again I wouldn't let them crowd out my beloved issues chart where I would have yes, no, and won't answer. During the campaign I'd use that chart so that if one day the issue of tax relief came up, I'd do the story and flash the box on what these candidates have said on two or three questions having to do with tax relief or tax cuts or tax policy.

Just to give you an example of how I might frame an issue: You could ask two people running in a senate race or a congressional race if they think that the gap between rich and poor in this country is too wide. "Yes or no?" That's easy, yes or no. Not it depends, not this, not that. Then you can ask those who think it is too wide, "Do you think that federal tax policy ought to do more to fix it, to readjust it? Yes or no?" Reasonable questions worthy of reasonable answers. If the candidates have longer answers they want to append to it maybe you put some of that in the story, maybe you put some of that on your Web site. But you have a chart with yes, no and won't answer. You'll start seeing patterns of people who won't answer anything. And that should be a story.

But at least instead of a mealy-mouthed story saying, so and so seems reluctant to address the issues at this point in the campaign, blah, blah, blah, you say, so and so has refused to answer nine out of the 10 questions we've given him. And let him attack you for saying that. Let him attack your

...in political coverage the accountability, the gotcha, has been misdirected. [It] has been directed toward all this personal stuff and not to issues.

questions. They should be good enough questions, and you should be able to defend them. I would devise a hypothetical based on something real, for example, having to do with school vouchers. Again ask, yes or no? It's a complicated policy, but if you really think about it you can boil it down and get a yes or no.

All of this would be aimed at getting journalism to do what it's supposed to do and what it does best. And that is to inform people in a democracy. Really inform. Inform them as consumers of a democracy. Inform them as voters. But again, none of these methods is going to matter if there's not the time and the effort put into the coverage. Nor is it going to matter if the coverage is crowded out by the latest "developments" in stories that aren't stories at all but are just there because they seem to get ratings because these other stories haven't been packaged and articulated well enough....

On television I'd be happy to be rude to the people I

interview in the following way: Ask that question to get a yes or no answer. "Do you think that we should use federal tax policy to narrow the gap between the rich and poor in this country?" Somebody gives you a two-minute speech. You say, "That's very interesting, but would you mind answering my question, yes or no?" Why don't we see more of that on television? Why is everybody part of the same club?

I don't think that's being negative or being rude in the way that gets attacked now for being negative and rude. The press gets attacked now for this because they're not interested in issues. They're not interested in those answers. They're interested in whether the guy running for office had a drinking problem 20 years ago. Or they're interested in whether his pollster is better than the other pollster. Or they're interested in his strategy. But simply saying to somebody, "That's very nice but you haven't answered my question. Can you give our viewers a yes or no? Yes or no, what's the answer? Oh, you won't answer my question."

I think that is what journalists were put on earth to do, to be rude about that kind of stuff and not be negative or rude about the political leader's personal life, his personal habits, his momentum, his lack of momentum. That's garbage compared to this stuff. And this stuff, I'm telling you, can be made dramatic by doing it that way. So I submit to you that seeing some of that on television may just be the kind of material that can compete with the JonBenet Ramsey stories, if we are willing to have the guts to do that.

I think that a lot of journalists in Washington, dare I say this at the National Press Club, because they're part of the same club as the people they're covering don't want to ask those questions. I mean, how many times have we all

watched one of the Sunday shows and said, "Why don't you just make him answer the damn question instead of giving a two-minute speech?" People love that. We all do this. If you've ever been coached to be on a book tour, peddling a book, you know what the first rule of being on a book tour is. Always answer the question that you wish they had asked. I as-

sume politicians are told that from the moment they're born. Which is, always answer the question you wish somebody had asked, not the question they did ask. It's our job not to let people get away from that....

My suggestion to you is that in political coverage the accountability, the gotcha, has been misdirected. The gotcha and the accountability has been directed toward all this personal stuff and not to issues.

I think there's a way, maybe I'm just a wonk at heart, but I think there is a way to make serious issues coverage interesting, to make political campaigns interesting. With some new creativity and new aggressiveness—combined again with the resources that you have to have to be able to do this stuff—you can create a kind of coverage that actually can do pretty well in the marketplace and compete with celebrity coverage and the coverage of non-issue issues that seem to be carrying the day today. ■

Journalist's Trade

As the century began, political reporters flocked to the front porch of the Canton, Ohio home of President William McKinley to dispatch his words to readers. Now, 100 years later, the speed of technology and transport, along with changing perceptions of how politics can and should be covered, sends candidates hurtling from state to state (either in person or via the electronic media) and makes reporters wonder what kind of news their dispatches should contain.

In the minds of many of his colleagues, James "Scotty" Reston, The New York Times's long-time political observer, got it right when he said of campaign correspondents, "The higher we flew, the less we knew." From the front porch to trains, from buses to planes, as presidential campaigns found new ways to reach more voters, reporters sought fresh approaches to communicating the story. Presidential biographer **Doris Kearns Goodwin** chronicles some of these changes in remarks she delivered at the opening of the Newseum's exhibit, "Every Four Years: Presidential Campaign Coverage, 1896-2000."

Then we hear from journalists, young and old, national and local, print, radio and Internet, about coverage of the 2000 election cycle and related topics. **Evan Thomas**, Assistant Managing Editor at Newsweek and Robert F. Kennedy biographer, describes the remoteness of most presidential candidates today and the impact on press coverage. **Jack W. Germond**, syndicated columnist with The (Baltimore) Sun, ponders whether solid political reporters are a vanishing breed. **Jack Nelson**, the Los Angeles Times's Chief Washington Correspondent, directs our attention to more of Germond's thoughts, gathered from his 40 years of covering politics, in his review of Germond's book, "Fat Man in a Middle Seat." And **Martin Nolan**, columnist for The Boston Globe, assesses New Hampshire coverage from his post in San Francisco.

Cartoonist **Ward Sutton** and an array of election observers examine the impact of celebrity and entertainment on political coverage. **Cragg Hines**, Washington Bureau Chief of the Houston Chronicle, ponders the position of second tier candidates posturing for coverage, and **Mike Mulcahy**, Senior Political Editor at Minnesota Public Radio, details the combative relationship Governor Jesse Ventura has with the press. **Mike Riley**, Editor of The Roanoke (Va.) Times, describes what it means for all politics, including its coverage, to be local.

Former ABC News political correspondent **Kathleen deLaski** recalls her journey from TV to the Internet, where she heads American Online's political coverage of the 2000 election. **Mark Stencel**, Editor of washingtonpost.com's OnPolitics, reminds us that interactivity is a given in the new media's coverage of politics, and Salon.com's Washington Correspondent **Jake Tapper** relives his memorable ride on John McCain's Straight Talk Express. National Public Radio reporter **Peter Overby** follows the candidates' money trail and **Diane Renzulli**, Director of State Projects at the Center for Public Integrity, explains why press scrutiny of state legislators should be a central part of the statehouse beat.

Some of our photographs of the presidential primaries were taken by photojournalism students at Boston University and at the University of California, Berkeley. ■

'The Higher We Flew, the Less We Knew.'

A Century of Reporting on the Race for the White House

Doris Kearns Goodwin, Guest Curator of the Newseum's 'Every Four Years: Presidential Campaign Coverage, 1896-2000,' spoke during the exhibit's opening on February 9. This show explores relationships among reporters and candidates in 20th century presidential campaigns. Excerpts follow.

By Doris Kearns Goodwin

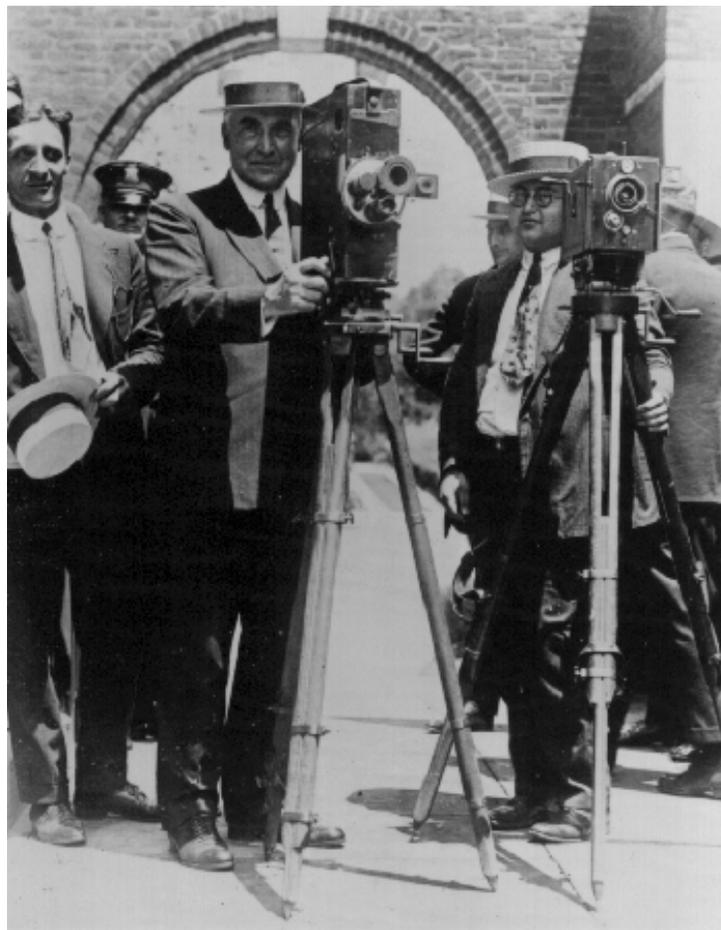
I think there are two ways of looking at this exhibit. On the one hand, you can see the arc of change over the century from the days when McKinley sat on his front porch, in the days before the man sought the office, rather the office sought the man. So 750,000 people actually traveled to Canton, Ohio, from all over the country to see him sitting on his front porch and talking and reporters stood on the lawn with pads and pencils recording his remarks.

And you move from that moment to the present day where the candidates come to the cities and towns and even to the homes of the people through the television and the Internet and reporters following along, first on trains, then on jet planes. In some sense, with each advance in technology, reducing the intimacy of the relationship between the reporters and the candidates.

James Reston once said he felt nostalgia for the old whistle-stop train days when he started out as a reporter, when they would sit together drinking, smoking, talking late at night, exchanging anecdotes with the candidates. He said, "The higher we flew, the less we knew."

And you can also see big changes over time in the relationships between the candidates and the reporters as the primaries replaced the party bosses to nominate the candidates. First newspapers, then radio, then television replaced the parties as the central screening mechanism to give the citizens information about the candidates. This put the media into a much more important role and escalated the age-old tension between the candidates and the members of the media.

On the other hand, what is so interesting [in this exhibit] is to see the continuing unchanging themes, such that even in the campaign of 2000 we can find echoes from this distant past... There is the constant struggle for the candidates to project the image they want to project vs. the reporters want-



Warren G. Harding smiling as he pretends to operate a newsreel camera. From "Every Four Years," at the Newseum/NY. Photo courtesy Corbis Images.

ing to project the image of the candidate that they see and want to describe. Witness that in 2000 we've talked about image over and over again, ranging from George W. Bush's smirk to Al Gore's continuing changing wardrobe to reflect his earth tones, to poor Steve Forbes's awkward facial expressions.

That concern [about image] goes way back to Teddy Roosevelt, when he was sort of the official campaign advisor for William Howard Taft, who weighed 350 pounds. And he told Taft, "Don't ever appear on a horse," even though there is a picture of him on a

horse here, "because it will be cruel to the horse and dangerous for you." He also advised him, "Don't ever play golf in public because golf is a dude's game and the working men don't like it." But Taft was able to persuade the reporters who were his friends to let him play golf and not take pictures of it.

My favorite story of image from earlier days concerns Calvin Coolidge. He had a very sour personality, so sour that Alice Roosevelt Longworth said that he was weaned on a pickle. So they had to figure out a way to warm him up before the election. So they went to a PR guy, Ed Bernays, and they brought him to Washington and he figured out that he would bring down a troop of Broadway people including Al Jolson, the great singer, and hopefully they could get him to smile, which no one could. Then they'd take a picture and he would look warm and fuzzy.

So he brings Al Jolson and all the troops down and they go through the receiving line and not a single smile from Coolidge and he [Bernays] is panicking. They bring him out to the White House lawn and finally Jolson sings a song to Coolidge, "Keep Cool With Coolidge in the Good Old USA." And there is a slight smile on Coolidge's face. Cameras get it. Front page of *The New York Times*: "Coolidge Nearly Laughs." Every reporter had the same thing. "Coolidge Smiles." He wins the election three weeks later....

We can also see a continuing theme in these exhibits of the shifting boundaries of what defines what should be private and what should be public, what is appropriate for reporters to cover. Consider the fact that in 1936 there was an unwritten code of honor in Roosevelt's era that reporters would not show him in a wheelchair or on crutches or with his braces on. A dramatic example occurred in 1936, when on his way to deliver his acceptance speech at the Democratic convention, he reached over to shake the hand of a supporter, lost his balance, his braces unlocked, he fell on the floor, his speech sprawled in front of him. He simply said to the Secret Service, "Clean me up." He got up to the podium, somehow got his speech back together, and delivered the great "Rendezvous With



President William McKinley speaks to supporters from the front porch of his Canton, Ohio, home during his re-election campaign in 1900. From "Every Four Years," on display through November 12. *Photo courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.*

Destiny" speech. Not a picture of him falling nor even a mention in the papers the next day that he had fallen. They simply reported the speech.

Contrast that with poor Bob Dole falling in 1996 off the stage in Chico, California.... He had leaned against a railing that hadn't been securely tightened. It had nothing to do with his age that he fell. A 10-year-old, had he leaned on that, would have fallen. But Dole had just mentioned, unfortunately, the Brooklyn Dodgers, which were no longer of course the Brooklyn Dodgers. Reporters drew from that fall that he was too feeble to remember what decade he was in and too feeble to even stand on his feet, drawing an unfair metaphor from this unfortunate fall. Then, of course, in this campaign we've had the great pleasure of watching Gary Bauer shoot pancakes up in the air and fall backwards off the stage. It is almost as if there is a relish to find these embarrassing moments where that code of honor existed so many years before.

And then you can look in the current campaign, too, and the generally positive coverage that McCain has gotten and realize the impact of a candidate's ability to reach out to the press and give the press what it needs—anec-

dotes, stories, openness, access. There are parallels with Teddy Roosevelt, who was really the first candidate who began to share anecdotes and colorful remarks. He invited the press to see his family, to tell stories about the family, and it was just at a time when photography was coming into the newspapers. The mass market papers loved human-interest stories. He understood that and played perfectly into their hands.

It spoiled every other candidate, however, because the press then thought they could get equal access to other candidates, so they actually followed his opponent, Alvin Parker, around on his morning ritual, a skinny-dip in the Hudson River. He was not too pleased about that.

But the interest in personality rose with the changing tide of photojournalism at that time. And then when Franklin Roosevelt came along, though publishers were routinely hostile to Roosevelt because of his New Deal, he was able to establish a relationship with the working reporters that cut across that line. There is an example at one time when he is on his train and one of the reporters missed getting on the train stop and couldn't write his copy, so Roosevelt actually wrote the



1960 debate between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon, from "Every Four Years."

Photo courtesy Corbis Images.

copy for the reporter so his editor wouldn't be mad. And as a result, there was a full and fair coverage in the news part of the newspapers even if the publishers hated Franklin Roosevelt....

The interesting reporter story of the 1948 campaign is that there was a poll of 50 of the top political writers who were on the train with Truman. They were asked to predict who was going to win. To a person, they all predicted Dewey. Fifty to nothing. In the morning, the Newsweek poll came out. Clark Clifford, Truman's advisor, was so excited that he went out of the train to get the poll. And he went and saw it and his face fell. So he hid it in his jacket as he came back into the train not wanting Truman to see it. But Truman knew immediately.

"What have you got there? I know you've got it there. Let me see it," he said. Sheepishly he handed it to Truman. Truman looked at it. Didn't bother him at all. "These guys wouldn't have enough sense to pound sand into a rat hole," he said. "Don't worry about it. Let's go on."

And the interesting thing is that after that campaign, James Reston wrote an article in The New York Times apologizing for their not seeing with their own eyes and not writing what they

had seen with their own eyes. They'd seen the enthusiasm of the crowds. They had seen the intensity of the relationship that Truman was developing. But, Reston said, "We listened to the tangibles instead of the intangibles. We listened to the polls. We fooled ourselves in a way."

Interestingly, there was recently an interview with Joe Klein on television talking about the fact that in that last week in New Hampshire reporters didn't know what to make of these polls that showed that George Bush was surging. They were writing about them. But David Broder, an old hand, looked at Joe Klein and said, "Don't listen to the polls. Look with your eyes." They saw the enthusiasm for McCain, and that was better than the polls at that point.

...As the new century dawns, the struggle between candidates and the media continues. Over the years, one could argue that the coverage of campaigns has become less partisan, more sophisticated, more capable of holding the candidates accountable. After the low point of 1988, featuring that Willie Horton ad, television and newspapers inaugurated ad watches. They have had a great impact on looking at the accuracy of ads, making citizens

more cynical about the ads, even making ads, in my optimistic judgment, less important now than they were in the past....

The percentage of people who can vote who go to the polls has declined precipitously from eight in 10 in 1900 to only five in 10 today. So it seems to me that the challenge for both the candidates and the media in the years ahead is somehow how to come together to stimulate more interest and a deeper involvement on the part of the people. For in the end, the candidates and the reporters need each other desperately. The truth is, as one reporter said, "They use each other at every turn," as it should be in a sometimes chaotic but always useful democracy.

In the question and answer session that followed, Goodwin elaborated on some of her earlier remarks.

In the old days reporters used to have code words for people. For people who were alcoholics, they said "they had a tendency toward excessive conviviality," and if somebody was a womanizer, instead of mentioning it—they knew that Harding had girlfriends. They knew one of his Republican supporters had sent one of his mistresses to the Orient to get her out of the country but they didn't think that was anybody's business. Obviously, now since Gary Hart, it has become people's business.... After we went through the impeachment scandal, there is less willingness on the part of the citizens to tolerate too much of this dragging out of public lives. And the press have had their own seminars, their own investigations into where is the proper line to be drawn, and I have a feeling we are turning back a little bit and there will be less of this. It will always be in the tabloids, but I suspect that in the major papers there is going to be more caution before they start revealing these things. At least, I hope so. ■

Doris Kearns Goodwin won the 1995 Pulitzer Prize for History for her book, "No Ordinary Time—Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II."

Getting to Know You

As many candidates retreat from the press, what we learn is what their strategists want us to know.

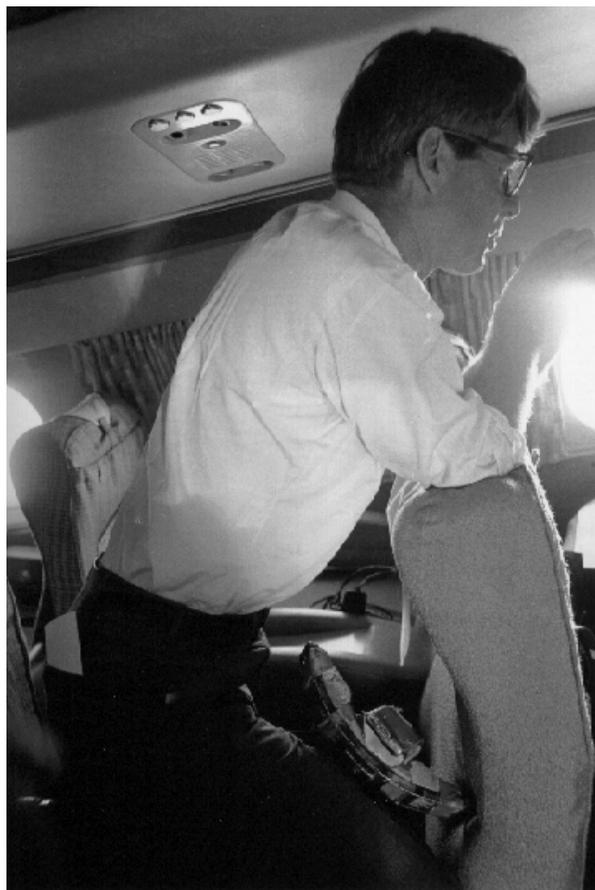
By Evan Thomas

Political campaigns have found different ways to influence the press over the years. Joseph Kennedy, father of John and Robert, sometimes used cash. In 1952, when JFK was running for the senate against Henry Cabot Lodge, the elder Kennedy secured the endorsement of the Boston Post, a then influential newspaper, by loaning the publisher half a million dollars. Joe Kennedy's sons took a more subtle approach. They invited journalists into their confidence and won them over with disarming frankness, asking political and personal advice and sharing gossip, often in a humorous vein. Some years after the 1952 election, Fletcher Knebel of *Look* magazine asked JFK about the rumors surrounding the endorsement of the Boston Post. "Yeah," said Kennedy, "We had to buy that paper." Kennedy knew that he could trust Knebel not to print his deadpan response. Knebel had covered Kennedy for years, usually on friendly terms; he simply understood that such remarks were off-the-record.

No politician today would make such an assumption, or dare to be so candid, even in a joking manner. Watergate and Vietnam effectively ended an era of trusting relationships between politician and reporter. To some degree, the new confrontational rules better serve the voter. The old coziness made it easier to manipulate reporters, to lull them with false honesty, and dull their inquisitiveness with a joke and a slap on the back. The intensely adversary nature of the relationship between a presi-

dential candidate and the press almost guarantees that the American people will not elect a President with a dark secret in his past.

But the "gotcha" culture has come with a price. For all their constant psychoanalyzing of political candidates, reporters may actually know less than



Robert F. Kennedy, 1968. Photo © Burton Berinsky.

they did in the days when a candidate could share a drink and some inside chat with a reporter without reading it in the papers the next day. Increasingly, candidates for high office, par-

ticularly the presidency, have withdrawn into a cocoon of handlers. The press has come to lionize and over-dramatize the senior campaign strategists and advisers—who often do become friends with reporters—while failing to truly understand the essential character of the candidates themselves. This distancing grows worse if the candidate wins. The White House in recent presidencies has become a bunker, surrounded by bristling guardians, furiously spinning and stonewalling.

The 2000 campaign has provided an exception to the rule. While other candidates were keeping reporters behind rope lines, John McCain was holding forth for two or three hours a day, on-the-record, and taking any question a reporter wanted to ask. McCain cracked jokes, teasing reporters as "Trotskyites," and laughingly saying that his media adviser "looks like he's just out of prison on work release." But he also spoke seriously about his views on the issues. McCain's extraordinary openness worked to make him popular with reporters and also to get out his message. In January, a study by the Washington-based Project for Excellence in Journalism found that 40 percent of McCain campaign stories were about what he had to say, compared to 26 percent for George Bush. The Bush stories tended to focus on the horserace, the basic staple of modern political coverage. The media's obsession with the mechanics of the race—handlers, polls, tactics—is generally a turnoff to voters. "We [the media] don't seem to

see the race as a clash between men and ideas," Tom Rosenstiel, the project director, told *The Washington Post*. "We seem to see it as a race between handlers and strategists.... It tends to make the race less relevant to voters."

I thought about these contrasting models in political coverage this winter as I finished a biography of Robert Kennedy, while at the same time pondering a book-length narrative of Campaign 2000 that I will write for *Newsweek*, to be published on election day. I realized in writing *Newsweek's* 1996 campaign narrative that as journalists following the old Teddy White model of offering the "you are there" campaign narrative, we were complicit in overstating the role played by the handlers. We need heroes and villains for our story, and if the candidates themselves were unavailable, their surrogates would have to do. I hope to guard against that somewhat lopsided view this time around, but it can be hard to see past the handlers, posing and posturing for their pals in the press, to the candidate within.

The extreme example of the old model was the 1968 Robert F. Kennedy campaign. During the 80 days between RFK's announcement in March and his death in June, the Kennedy campaign plane became a rollicking caravan, an almost too-interwoven bonding of candidate and press corps. The traveling press teased and sang and partied with Kennedy as they marched from Indiana to Nebraska to Oregon to California. In one extraordinary scene, described in an oral history by *Life* magazine reporter Sylvia Wright, the reporters and RFK collapsed together, like a pack of hounds, in the front of the plane on a night flight to Oregon, exhausted from singing folk songs together after a hard day of campaigning. Imagine a presidential candidate today lying down and nodding off with jackals of the press! RFK did not view the reporters who covered him as adversaries, or even, really, as reporters. "Bobby had felt about us like we were not the press," Wright recalled. "He would say to us, 'When we land here, I'm not going to be ready, keep the press away from me.' What he meant by

'the press' was strangers from the local press that he didn't know."

In that freewheeling era, it all seemed spontaneous, a 1960's "happening"—except that it wasn't really. RFK had about 20 years of practice at stroking reporters. As Chief Counsel to the Senate Rackets Committee in the late 1950's, RFK routinely traded information about labor corruption with investigative reporters and hired some of the best—Ed Guthman, Pierre Salinger, John Seigenthaler—as aides. As Attorney General, RFK remarked that he spent most of his time in the first few months talking to reporters. Kennedy was very open with the newsmen. He invited them out to Hickory Hill to swim in his pool and play touch football and asked, with evident sincerity, their advice on policy matters. When the Justice Department was involved in difficult and intense negotiations to end segregation in Birmingham, Alabama, in the spring of 1963, he allowed a reporter from the Birmingham paper—hardly a likely ally—to sit in on his strategy sessions. By showing he had nothing to hide, and by subtly making reporters feel like members of his team, Kennedy won the trust and admiration of many newsmen. In return for access, reporters routinely showed their stories to Kennedy in advance of publication—something most reporters would not do now.

When Kennedy announced that he was running for President in March 1968—a few days after Eugene McCarthy shocked President Lyndon Johnson with a strong showing in the New Hampshire primary—many reporters regarded the New York senator as a "ruthless" opportunist. But Kennedy was able to win over even the most hard-bitten newsmen who covered his campaign. John Harwood of *The Washington Post*, a crusty ex-Marine, criticized RFK for demagoguery in an early story, so infuriating the candidate's wife that she threw a balled-up copy of the newspaper in his face. But after traveling, playing touch football, singing and drinking and joking and talking with RFK for two months, Harwood felt compelled to call his editor, Ben Bradlee, and ask to be

moved to a different beat. Harwood honestly confessed to Bradlee that he had lost all objectivity.

Kennedy was able to maintain a strict discipline among reporters: Anything said or done on the campaign plane stayed there. (An AP reporter was kicked off the plane for writing that the candidate, conserving his hoarse voice, had signaled a stewardess for a drink by drawing an "S" in the air, for Scotch.) Watergate and the Washington scandal culture it spawned doomed such discretion. Washington hostesses began lamenting that "there is no such thing as off-the-record anymore." Off-color or ad hominem remarks made over dinner tables began appearing in print. Nor surprisingly, many politicians and policymakers began staying away from social gatherings where a reporter might be present. Conversations became more guarded and banal.

The news did not dry up, of course. Reporters merely looked for new ways to get information. In politics, they often turned to the handlers—the campaign managers, media advisers, professional pollsters—who were taking an increasingly assertive role in election campaigns. Reporters were willing to make implicit bargains with the aides. Campaign advisers would feed the reports inside tidbits, polling data, and "oppo," opposition research. Reporters would protect their sources and more—they would often magnify and enhance the strategic or tactical brilliance of the men and women behind the candidate. A casual reading of the coverage of the '92 campaign would reveal that the true heroes were not Clinton and Gore—but rather Clinton's chief advisers, James Carville and George Stephanopoulos. Within a few years, Carville and Stephanopoulos had dropped any pretense of playing their roles behind the scenes: They were media giants on the lecture circuit and regulars on the talk shows.

Typically in a modern presidential campaign, the candidate floated off in middle distance, often a figure of obstinacy or even buffoonery to his own staff. The more cynical handlers treated their bosses as nuisances who got in the way of efficient, well run campaigns.

Candidates to them were like children, to be brought out and paraded around before bedtime, then sent to their rooms. They had to be kept “on message.” Extraneous remarks were dangerous, and hence frowned upon. A gross example was the '96 Bob Dole campaign. As a senator, Dole, a wry old hand, had a good relationship with reporters. But on the campaign he was treated as a problem child by the hired guns who had been imported to package and sell him. Dole was increasingly kept away from reporters, lest he embarrass himself. After a while, the reporters, many of whom had not known the real Bob Dole, were showing Dole the same condescension that his handlers did.

Part of John McCain's appeal in the 2000 campaign has been that he rebelled against this model (which he witnessed first hand; McCain often traveled with Dole in '96). McCain's free-floating press conferences on his campaign bus have had some of the same we-are-family feel as Bobby Kennedy's 1968 campaign plane, though in fact McCain was taking a much greater risk, since everything he said was on-the-record. Even so, reporters felt protective of him. They were beguiled by his self-deprecating charm and warmed by the feeling of “insiderness.” His playful insults made them feel like friendly combatants and forget or overlook ideological differences. In a reversal of form, reporters tended to downplay rather than exaggerate his gaffes. While other campaigns would elaborately strategize ways to handle the candidate's missteps, McCain would typically make an off-the-cuff joke about it or simply ad-

mit error and move on.

Despite McCain's success with the Straight Talk Express, the McCain model is not likely to create a widely followed precedent. It's true that Bush, following McCain's example, has tried to be somewhat more open with reporters. After New Hampshire, the curtain separating the candidate from re-

porters, at least for long stretches on-the-record. Future candidates themselves may be tempted to try to emulate McCain—but maybe not. After the New Hampshire primary, I ran into Bob Dole and asked him about his experience in 1996. “They kept me up front in the plane, away from the press. That was a mistake,” he said. Then he



Robert F. Kennedy, 1968. Photo © Burton Berinsky.

porters in the campaign plane swung open, and Bush began bowling oranges down the aisle and chatting up reporters. But bowling oranges is an old boys-on-the-bus stunt, and Bush stayed off-the-record. Al Gore was reasonably accessible to reporters when he needed them—when he was trying to recover from a slow start in the summer and fall of 1999. But as soon as he pulled safely ahead of Bill Bradley, he barely acknowledged the traveling press. Bradley steered clear of reporters when he was on the way up—and on the way down.

Most handlers still believe that their candidates are too inept and gaffe-prone to be allowed out amongst the

thought back. “I did open up once to Kit Seelye [who was covering the campaign for *The New York Times*]. That,” he recalled with a rueful smile, “was also a mistake.” As long as candidates and their handlers believe that there is more to be gained from spin than openness, the McCain model will remain the exception and RFK's 1968 campaign a distant memory. ■

Evan Thomas is Assistant Managing Editor of Newsweek. From 1986 to 1996, he was the magazine's Washington Bureau Chief. His biography of Robert F. Kennedy will be published in September by Simon & Schuster.

Are Political Reporters a Vanishing Breed?

After 40 years on the beat, one journalist thinks they might be.

By Jack W. Germond

One night late in the New Hampshire primary campaign I went to Richard's Bistro, the restaurant of choice in Manchester these days, with Bill Daley, the Secretary of Commerce, and Charles Campion, a political consultant from Boston. There were two tables of reporters there that night and over the next hour or so two or three of them stopped to speak to Daley. The suspicion crossed my mind, ungenerous though it may have been, that if he provided a quote, he could end up on three or four expense accounts that night.

What struck me most forcefully, however, was that these reporters apparently did not know Chuck Campion, although he probably knows as much about Democratic primaries in the state as anyone in the business. One of Campion's partners in the Dewey Square Group, Michael Whouley, was serving as field director for Vice President Al Gore, and another, Charlie Baker, was working out of the headquarters applying his expertise from his days as a strategist there for Michael S. Dukakis in 1988. Campion himself went all the way back to 1984, when he ran Walter Mondale's well managed if unsuccessful operation in New Hampshire.

Nor was this the first time I had such an experience during the primary campaign. Seven months earlier I was in a gaggle of reporters waiting outside an event for George W. Bush when three long-time Republican activists passed by unrecognized.

Neither of these episodes was particularly revealing; you can cover a New Hampshire primary without recognizing Chuck Campion. But we can draw some inferences from these moments about how the nature of political coverage has changed. The first is that the whole concept of the "political

reporter" as such is outmoded, at least insofar as the term is applied to the coverage of presidential campaigns today. A generation ago there were a dozen to perhaps 15 of us who covered the national politics beat four years around. We covered not only presidential campaigns but also contests for governor, senate and house seats and occasionally mayor's offices that were either intrinsically interesting to readers or potentially significant in terms of the national political balance of power. We covered some regional governors' conferences just to keep in touch with what was happening around the country. We didn't cover much except electoral politics. Once a candidate took office, many of us lost interest.

Most of us had consultants as sources with whom we had been dealing for several election cycles in several different states. These were people whose company we enjoyed even if we didn't learn anything over the dinner table or a nightcap in the hotel bar. They helped provide a more developed picture of the candidates and campaigns they represented. Sometimes you could draw valuable inferences from the tone of their conversation. A campaign strategist slipping into the past tense could be revealing. So could consultants fixing blame for things that had gone wrong in a campaign.

Even in the 1980's, it was also possible to spend some social time with the candidates themselves. Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter would have dinner with a political reporter. In the 1984 New Hampshire primary campaign John Glenn was willing to relax with reporters over a Grand Marnier, Gary Hart would share a meal with four or five of us, some of whom had known him in his earlier incarnation as George McGovern's campaign manager. And even the ostensibly buttoned-up Fritz

Mondale might ask you up to his suite for a late night cigar, beer and cheese.

The relationship between reporters and campaigns today is quite different, a casualty of the changes in both the press and politics. These days it seems as if every reporter who has ever covered a debate in the House of Representatives or a city council election shows up in Iowa and New Hampshire.

The presidential primary story is overrun with reporters from niche magazines and camera crews from local television stations and obscure cable news operations. When the State Department arranged a briefing for foreign reporters in New Hampshire, 60 people showed up from places as diverse as Hong Kong and Helsinki. The geometric growth in the size of the press mob, in itself, has changed the nature of the campaign. We are now covering a spectacle we have created ourselves.

The inevitable result is that much of the coverage is derivative, meaning that it plays off of the reporting of a handful of major news organizations. Most of those covering the story have so few firsthand sources they are left to focus their reporting on the same public events that appear on the network television screens every night. Too often it puts them at the mercy of the unfamiliar consultants who trail around after the candidates spinning their purposeful if fanciful descriptions of what is happening.

This doesn't suggest that the reporters covering campaigns today are any less capable than those from the previous generation who covered the campaigns of Robert F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon. On the contrary, those assigned this year have shown impressive drive, discipline and writing skill. They are different, however. Most of them don't seem to like politicians or

their advisors very well, as evidenced by their apparent preference for dining together rather than with a potential source. And few of them plan to make a career out of covering politics. It is a credential on the way to becoming a managing editor or still another talking head on television.

The change in the candidates and the nature of campaigns is every bit as significant as the change in the press corps. Politics is all mechanics. Most candidates are so programmed and scripted that someone who behaves spontaneously, as John McCain did this year, can cause a sensation. Look, Ma, a politician just said what's on his mind! Indeed, these days campaigns seem to follow formulas written in some backroom laboratory. Everyone has the same objective data from daily tracking polls, as well as whatever wisdom that can be derived from extensive polling and focus groups. If Al Gore suddenly spends an entire day at an elementary

school, as he did early this spring, it is safe to infer that the campaign's polling agrees with that of other polltakers that Gore has particular problems to overcome. Too many voters don't like him. Too many women in particular don't like him. George W. Bush is gaining an edge on the education issue. You don't have to be an expert in political reporting to figure that one out.

The political mechanics are in full control of campaigns. They have learned that most Americans gain their knowledge of politics from what they see on television, either in the form of commercials or the news reports, such as they are, carried by the three broadcast television networks. And they have learned that negative campaigning works. The biggest of the Big Lies eventually will convince enough voters if repeated often enough. Immediately after losing New Hampshire to McCain by 19 percent, Bush spent a weekend

in Austin, then emerged from a telephone booth as the "reformer with results"—the implication being that he wasn't the reformer who tilts at windmills, meaning McCain. The Texas governor kept describing himself in those words, and he made every appearance standing before a large blue curtain bearing those words. Ten days later surveys found that when voters in Republican primaries were asked which of their two candidates represented reform, as many named Bush as McCain. There is no penalty for shamelessness in American politics.

If this is what campaigns are about at the turn of the century, it doesn't take a political reporter with a wealth of sources to cover them. Anyone can do it. ■

Jack W. Germond, a syndicated columnist with The (Baltimore) Sun, claims he is covering his last presidential campaign.

The geometric growth in the size of the press mob, in itself, has changed the nature of the campaign. We are now covering a spectacle we have created ourselves.



Photo by David L. Ryan, courtesy of The Boston Globe.

Political Journalism, the Way It Used to Be

Jack Germond remembers the different old days.

Fat Man in a Middle Seat: Forty Years of Covering Politics

Jack W. Germond
Random House. 284 Pages. \$25.95.

By Jack Nelson

When Ronald Reagan was running for President in 1979, Jack Germond's first close-up view of him was a doozy. It came at a small off-the-record dinner with Reagan, his wife, Nancy, and three Reagan aides. During the dinner conversation, Germond found himself "wondering if these people lived in the real world."

Now that more than 20 years have passed, Germond feels free to tell the inside story of how the California governor turned conspiratorial and a little loony in discussing presidential politics. And how in eight years as President, Reagan "was always a man with a very loose hold on the real world around him."

At the dinner, Reagan brought up the case of the FBI detaining a derelict who was in a Los Angeles crowd being addressed by President Carter. Although the derelict had a starter's pistol in his pocket, there was no evidence he was a threat to the President. But Reagan began wondering aloud if the incident was a put-up job similar to what he believed happened in 1976, the year President Ford defeated him for the Republican presidential nomination.

That year two attempts were made to assassinate Ford, and Reagan figured the attempts were staged for political purposes to create a "sympathy vote" for Ford and deprive Reagan of the Republican nomination. In Reagan's eyes, the Carter folks might have been staging another incident in a search for a sympathy vote. Even Reagan's aides, who had arranged the dinner, viewed

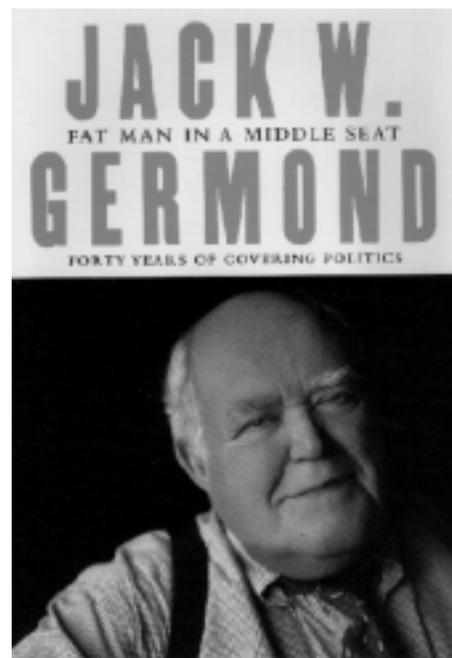
his ideas as so bizarre that Germond found them staring at either the ceiling or the floor.

The dinner, Germond writes, was "a classic example of political-press symbiosis; they were trying to shape my thinking about Reagan and I was willing to let them in exchange for getting a closer look at the candidate."

Fortunately for the reader, Germond has used that political-press symbiosis to get a lot of closer looks during his 40 years of reporting politics. As a result, he has written a memoir rich with anecdotes and insights into the politicians he has covered.

And a rollicking 40 years it's been. Given all Germond's dining and drinking with politicians—and a superabundant amount of it is recounted in this memoir—he found that sometimes he just couldn't resist violating journalism's rule against reporters becoming too cozy with people they cover. Germond even found that Robert Strauss, the wily Democratic leader with close links to the Reagan and Bush Administrations, was such good company that he "couldn't help but go into the tank" for him.

Germond skirted another journalist's rule by offering Strauss political advice in the early 1980's when the Texan was thinking of running for President. Germond discouraged him from running, reminding him he was "a Jew from Texas who had made a lot of money in a lot of deals everybody would be poking into. And more to the point he was a wiseass. If he became a candidate, he would be forever explaining his smart mouth."



Germond himself comes off as something of a wiseass in some of his razor sharp assessments of public figures he's covered. He's especially piercing in assessing George Bush, with whom he admittedly had a personal falling-out during the 1979 campaign after being quoted in *The Wall Street Journal* as saying of the presidential candidate, "if you hold him up to the light, he doesn't throw a shadow." While in Washington, Germond found Bush to be "the most vacuous man to occupy the Oval Office." In his book Germond variously refers to him as "a wimp," "an empty suit," and "a totally amoral campaigner."

Even Reagan, despite his flights of fancy, looked "10 feet tall" to Germond compared to Bush and Bill Clinton. And so did Jimmy Carter, Gerald R.

Ford, Lyndon B. Johnson, and John F. Kennedy, although Richard Nixon's "felonious conduct puts him in a category beyond comparison."

Germond writes nostalgically of earlier days when political reporters were hard-drinking and spent countless hours in bars and were mostly males who did their share of womanizing. Many reporters smoked and dropped ashes and butts on floors that had never seen carpeting. One of the few women around his newsroom was a provocatively dressed secretary who would be summoned so reporters could leer at her. He notes wistfully, "today that would be called sexist behavior, but the term hadn't even been invented then."

Covering politics was the ultimate assignment in those days, but he believes many of today's younger reporters see it as just another assignment and not nearly as much fun. They don't drink as much and when they do it's white wine or beer rather than Irish whiskey. And he doesn't discern much womanizing or poker playing.

Although a dedicated print reporter throughout his career, the roly-poly

Germond became known nationally with his frequent television appearances, beginning with a 1972 appearance on NBC-TV's "Meet the Press." He writes candidly about the "heady experience" of becoming a television celebrity and how it helped him secure fat speaking fees. He found people clamoring for his views and concluded, "you could write your fingers off for 25 years...and never get the kind of hearing you could get from shooting off your mouth on television for a half hour every week."

As the fat man in the middle seat on "The McLaughlin Group," a shouting match that provides more heat than light, Germond shot his mouth off weekly for 15 years until a final falling out with John McLaughlin, the show's pompous and overbearing host.

Germond calls McLaughlin a "loud-mouthed bully" and describes several clashes with him, including one in which he upbraided the former Catholic priest after learning he was pocketing up to \$10,000 and paying Germond and other panelists only \$2,500 for joint lecture appearances. The final

clash came at a 1996 luncheon where McLaughlin announced the program was going to be distributed internationally and Germond wisecracked that McLaughlin could now take credit for "dumbing down the whole world." Although Germond insisted he considered it the usual "McLaughlin Group" banter, McLaughlin was not amused and excluded him from several shows. Germond subsequently resigned.

Germond admits his misgivings about being on a show that many journalists criticize as a food fight and that he describes as "grotesque" some weeks. It risked his reputation as a serious journalist and his friend, The Washington Post's David Broder, disapproved of his participation. But Germond, like some other journalists, decided it was worth it because of the celebrity factor and the money—\$600 a week from the show, plus hefty lecture fees. Would he watch it now that he's not on it? "No." ■

Jack Nelson, 1962 Nieman Fellow, is the Chief Washington Correspondent of the Los Angeles Times.

Watching New Hampshire From Far Away

In California, not all was as it had appeared.

By Martin F. Nolan

In California, politics is not a contact sport. Interest in presidential politics ranks somewhere below soccer in a roster of civic concerns. Even in Sacramento, cockpit of decision-making for the planet's seventh-largest economy, politics seems a remote concern compared to life, liberty and the weather. The ups and downs of political ambition do not fill the ether the way speculation rises like steam on the sidewalks of Albany, Boston, Harrisburg, Annapolis and certainly Concord, New Hampshire.

California is too big to be exotic, but New Hampshire, a theme park of nostalgia, is an inviting target for parachute journalism. Tom Stoppard de-

finied a foreign correspondent in "Night and Day," his 1978 play: "He's someone who flies around from hotel to hotel and thinks the most interesting thing about any story is the fact that he has arrived to cover it." If life imitates art, truth can mimic satire. Stoppard's vision evoked the New Hampshire that flickered onto C-SPAN screens in January.

Like most Americans, I witnessed the Granite State's show on television. I was in California, which had moved its primary from June to March. It was the first quadrennial cotillion I had missed reporting since 1968, the winter I spent trying to decipher the prose of George W. Romney and to duck the

whimsical barbs of Eugene J. McCarthy. I did not miss joining those scratching for stories profound enough to justify our august presence, or at least our expense accounts.

The New Hampshire primary has been on the endangered species list since 1952, when voting citizens became more important than dealmakers in smoke-filled rooms. It's too small, it's too unrepresentative, the voters are monochromatic (98 percent white), but demographics will not dislodge the Granite State, nor will the wretched excess of the quadrennial media invasion. The state's collective judgment might.

New Hampshire stamped passports

to glory for Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard M. Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and George Bush. But its momentum, the "bounce," faltered for Gary Hart, Michael Dukakis, Paul Tsongas, Pat Buchanan, and most notoriously for John McCain. His "Straight Talk Express" cannily converted the town meeting idea into a traveling "Truman Show," a tableau of nonstop candor with the media in co-starring roles. Just days after his victory in New Hampshire, when McCain arrived at the Republican state convention in Burlingame, he fairly floated on magazine-cover euphoria.

One of the first questioners, Randy Shandobil of KTVU in Oakland, asked him about "a private fundraiser that might be perceived as hypocritical." What about it? "I'm shocked, I'm shocked," McCain said in a Claude Rains-in-Casablanca cadence that would have brought knowing chuckles among the scribes rolling along the off-ramps of Route 93 in New Hampshire.

The joke did not fly in Burlingame. Other reporters persisted and McCain said to Shandobil, "I don't know anything about it, sir. I've been working 16, 18, 20 hours a day. I can't give you an explanation. I'd be glad to refer you to my staff." The paladin of "reform" sounded like another testy politician. Mike Murphy, McCain's media adviser, fretted that reporters were steering his man into the quagmire of 20 statewide ballot issues, including gay marriage. He complained that "It's not that the answers aren't straight. The questions are crooked."

When California abandoned its June primary to enhance its clout on the campaign calendar, the usual civic

worriers began to keen and wail. The allegedly intimate cracker-barrel charm of New Hampshire would surrender to the frantic freeway distractions of California, alas. Personal politics would yield to television commercials. Money would dominate.

Not to worry. Candidates did not enrich California television stations because they had already blown their bankrolls elsewhere. George W. Bush showed a singular talent for adhering to Parkinson's Second Law: Expenditure always rises to meet income.



A McCain town hall meeting in Sacramento, California. Photo © Bjorn Brekkel U.C. Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, Center for Photography.

McCain squandered a more precious currency, his message. From the cozy cocoon of his bus, McCain dominated the media landscape of New Hampshire. A 19-point win in New Hampshire became a 24-point loss in California. His decline was similar in the other states that massed together for the first national primary.

The bad news for the Arizona senator was shared not only by New Hampshire but by the cause he espoused, the "reform" of campaign finance. McCain shook hands with Bill Bradley and signed a joint pledge in Claremont, New Hampshire. But the issue bored or angered the millions of voters who voted against it and them.

Neither candidate heard much about campaign finance from reporters, but

the issue was a foremost concern of editorial writers. On "Face the Nation" the Sunday before Titanic Tuesday, Gloria Borger of CBS and U.S. News & World Report asked Bush: "Governor, why is it that every major New York newspaper today seems to have endorsed John McCain's candidacy?" He replied, "I don't know. You better ask the editors up there. He can have the editorial page endorsements. I want the votes of the people who are going to decide who the Republican nominee is. I think I've got a good chance in New York."

So he did, and in California and Ohio, too. The message of "reform" from New Hampshire was confined to New England on March 7. The message, as amplified by the 700 or 800 reporters there did not, as a media cliché of campaigns past would have it, "resonate" in the precincts west of the Presidential Range of the White Mountains.

"In 1956, there had been just seven of us reporters in the final weekend, footsloggers all," Theodore H. White recalled in his memoirs.

"The old seven-man expeditionary press corps had consisted of an AP man; a UP man; a Boston Globe man; reporters of the Concord and Manchester papers, locals; a single magazine reporter, myself; and on the final weekend, The New York Times had sent its Boston Bureau Chief to Manchester to grace the event with the full majesty of the nation's leading newspaper."

Teddy White knew his numbers. He knew, too, that ballooning the size of the media mob seldom adds to the substance of human wisdom. ■

Martin F. Nolan writes for The Boston Globe from California.

Playing the Celebrity Game

Candidates transform themselves into entertainers.

Mrs. Clinton Shows Up, Successfully

Joyce Purnick

Metro Matters

The New York Times

January 13, 2000

...Hillary and Dave, neighbors and friends, candidate and comedian, politician and antipolitician, enjoying a few laughs, reading a few lists, exchanging one-liners and a few teasing moments. Nothing tough, nothing rough. Just fun....

America is seeing the ultimate in the fusion of not just entertainment and news, but entertainment, news and politics. And truth be told, the candidates have no choice. They have to play. The public demands it.

We have gone from an appearance on the old, stodgy "Meet the Press" as political validation to softballs from Larry King to David Letterman....

Mr. Letterman chooses to be a funny man, not a political analyst. The question for us all to ask is why a candidate is compelled to get into the celebrity game....

[T]o succeed politically and sometimes journalistically these days, we have made it a necessity to enter the popular culture. To say no is to appear grim and out of it. Nor can a public figure afford to offend the Lettermans and Lenos, because they so affect the collective public psyche, somehow.

Last night, Mr. Letterman's amiable executive producer, Rob Burnett, briefed the press. He was admirably forthcoming, more so than some dissembling political press secretaries. But he was briefing us about a bit of entertainment.

No wonder people are confused about the importance of celebrity, mistaking it for accomplishment. No wonder we elect actors and people who could be actors, and Donald Trump actually gets himself taken seriously as a political figure in some quarters....



Cartoon courtesy of Ward Sutton.

McCain and Bush Take to the Late-Night Airwaves

Don Aucoin

The Boston Globe

March 1, 2000

...A recent survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press found that nearly 1 in 10 Americans said they regularly pick up information about the presidential campaign from Leno, Letterman, and their cohorts.

But of those respondents younger than 30, the percentage was much higher—47 percent—who said they were informed “at least occasionally” by the late-night shows....

By venturing into the late-night arena that young people have always embraced as their own, a candidate's goal is to achieve a quick image makeover as hip, fun, iconoclastic, and a good sport—in sum, a figure for whom young people should vote....

Unlike “Meet the Press,” “The Tonight Show” isn't looking to break any earth-shattering news. “You can't hope the whole republic goes in the toilet because you get 20 good minutes,” laughed Leno. “You can't operate on that principle.”

Wake Me When It's Almost Over

Frank Rich, Journal

The New York Times

January 29, 2000

[O]ur political culture has been in overdrive, trying to cook up creative story lines. There were the sagas of George W. Bush's smirks (and alleged snorts), Al Gore's sighs (and alleged tokes), John McCain's tantrums, Bill Bradley's heart flips, Warren Beatty's mind games and, of course, Donald Trump's sex life. There was the Naomi Wolf “alpha male” flap and the spirited debate over the true meaning of the Confederate flag....

Given four contenders so eager to hug the center, conventional wisdom has it that this election is a battle over character—hence the endless dissection of smirks and sighs and the con-

stant lookout for this year's magic balm, authenticity. But none of the big four show any sign whatsoever of being sociopaths or, despite the Bickersons routine of Messrs. Gore and Bradley, compulsive liars. Nor, being politicians, will any of the four prove to be completely authentic or free of smarminess....

Dignity, Always Dignity

Gail Collins, Public Interests

The New York Times

January 28, 2000

...All the candidates for President have been promising to bring decorum back to the White House. But they're campaigning in an age when politicians are forced to compete with entertainment celebrities for TV time and magazine covers, and the temptation to do something peculiar to get attention keeps expanding....

The longer you campaign, and the more tenuous your hold on success, the harder it is to resist the siren call of a Playboy interview or a gig as host of “Saturday Night Live.” Bill Bradley, who has been trying to expand the ever-shrinking privacy rights of a presidential candidate, was reduced this week to answering a question about whether he had ever cried after losing a basketball game. (No, but he cried after talking to a woman whose family didn't have any medical insurance.) John McCain came under attack from Mr. Keyes (pre-mosh pit immersion) for having joked that Nine Inch Nails, of “God is dead and no one cares” fame, was his favorite band. Unmoved, Mr. McCain later added that he had “noticed at the MTV awards that Busta Rhymes was wearing a dress. And I'd like to know if I can borrow that for the swearing-in ceremony.”...

A New York Moment

Gail Collins, Public Interests

The New York Times

March 3, 2000

...A skill at guesting on late-night television has become a critical require-

ment for the presidential candidate of the 21st century, right up there with pretending to like surfing the Internet. These programs have become such a critical part of our political culture that the Center for Media and Public Affairs has an ongoing project counting the jokes told about the candidates. Mr. Bush was the presidential candidate most frequently made fun of over the last year, the object of 293 late-night sallies, followed by 275 for Mr. Gore.

“It's all about foibles and foul-ups and physiques,” said Bob Lichter, the Center's president....

Do you understand now, people, why Al Gore is in his cabin doing stomach crunches while he flies around campaigning? A health plan is all well and good, but nobody is going to listen to policy from a guy with flabby abs.

The Laugh-a-Minute Oval Office

Susan Silver, Op-ed

The New York Times

May 4, 2000

I enjoyed Bill Clinton's comedy video for the Washington correspondents' dinner, but does anyone share my uneasy feeling that it might have been the final straw in the unfortunate blurring of show business and politics?

Bill had great timing, did his facial shtick well and got the schlump walk perfectly. And I do feel I can call him Bill now. “Mr. President” sounds so serious for someone who looked so right hanging out with Stuart, the guy who puts his face in the copy machine in the TV commercial.

I'm worried, though, about what this will do to Al Gore and George W. Bush. Now that the bar has been raised so high, America will be looking for a major laugh riot talent in the next president of the United States....

I just hope no budding statesman out there thinks being an experienced, intelligent, hardworking politician is going to be enough from now on. That's a pretty funny joke right there. But it's on us. ■

Blame Abe Lincoln and Steve Forbes

But don't expect journalists to give second tier candidates equal attention.

By Cragg Hines

"The so-called second tier, if you will..."—Wolf Blitzer, CNN, during the New Hampshire primary campaign.

Into the chaos of the media filing center after last fall's Republican presidential debate at Dartmouth College walked Alan Keyes. The unlikely White House contender mounted the podium and waited for post-event questions. There were none. And he couldn't stand it. Before huffing off, Keyes, the only African-American seeking the nomination of either major party, denounced the assembled journalists, almost all of whom were white, as racists.

Keyes, not widely known for his media skills (except for playing his race for all it's worth with the famously self-conscious national press), did not know the difference between benign neglect and deadline pressure. But there was, in fact, nothing most journalists wanted to ask Keyes on a spot basis, except perhaps what he was doing in the debate in the first place—and what they were doing paying any attention to him at all.

The strange scene in the loud, crowded Dartmouth hall helped to frame one of the more interesting questions of the 2000 campaign: Have minor candidates such as Keyes been covered too much or not enough? Hardly anyone thinks the coverage has been just right.

The same question, without the entangling racial implications, applied to Keyes's fellow candidate and conservative activist Gary Bauer.

Here were two guys who never had won a race for city council, much less some significant state or federal office, which has come to be seen as an entry-level qualification for the presidency.

They also failed to pass muster on two other important criteria that journalists consider before bestowing significant coverage: campaign funding and significant backing from party figures of consequence. Both are imprecise but seemingly valid early measures of popular and political establishment support.

Bauer most recently had been Director of the Family Research Council, a conservative group strong in its opposition to abortion. Keyes, who also sought the Republican nomination in 1996, was a failed U.S. Senate candidate in Maryland and sometime talk show host. Each conflated modest postings in the Reagan administration, supplemented by subsequent roles on the Republican Right, into presidential campaigns that got them into nationally televised debates, if not consistent print or broadcast coverage.

Abraham Lincoln and Steve Forbes are to blame.

Lincoln, with his string of often unsuccessful attempts at office before riding out of Illinois to save the Union, offers an appealingly cautionary tale about disregarding the unlikely candidate. Does David Broder or Joe Klein or Tom Brokaw want to have it on his conscience that by some sin of omission he denied the nation the next Great Emancipator?

This is, of course, historical sophistry and ignores the many differences between then and now, not least of them the pre-Civil War proliferation of political parties and the lack of truly national media in the mid-19th century. Lincoln, viewed more properly, is the candidate who proves the rule that prior top-level governmental experience is needed before taking on a national campaign that deserves to be taken seriously.

(Perhaps it's worth noting that U.S. Representative Tom Coburn, the Oklahoma Republican who became Keyes's only congressional endorser, likened Keyes to Lincoln, saying the social conservative understands America's "underlying national crisis." Keyes did not shrink from the comparison.)

Forbes, the multimillionaire publisher, got us into the current mess. Here was a guy with so much of his own money that in 1996 he bought his way into semi-acceptability as a presidential contender. The field of more established Republican candidates was so light four years ago that the media (and some voters) took Forbes and his flat-tax proposal sort of seriously for about four months. Perhaps foretelling the party's (and Bob Dole's) problems in November, Forbes even lucked his way into a couple of early primary victories before quitting that race and beginning immediately to retool for 2000.

This time around, Forbes and his bankbook were back. He had not only a canny strategist, Bill Dal Col (a repeat from 1996), but also a superbly organized media staff packed with well-known young Republican agents with whom reporters love to share a drink or rumor (if not deeper ideological discussions).

Forbes, too, had been a Reagan appointee, but he had never sought, much less won, any electoral office except the presidency. So if journalists were going to once again buy into his well greased act, how could they in good conscience totally write off (as many would have liked to) Keyes and Bauer?

Additionally, Keyes carried a cautionary warning for the media from his 1996 campaign. After being cut out of a couple of debates, he encamped outside an Atlanta television studio until the cops were called. As *The Econo-*

mist this year remembered the scene: "The embarrassment of seeing the country's only black presidential candidate carted off...in handcuffs so traumatised the networks that they were never likely to make the same mistake again."

As far as print reporters were concerned, some seasoned journalistic hands believe younger practitioners simply lacked the nerve or judgment to pare the list down to size.

"When I was covering the New Hampshire primary," recalled Martin Nolan, the highly regarded Boston Globe correspondent, "Gary Bauer would have been listed as one of the minor candidates, one of the guys in an Uncle Sam suit."

How the minor candidates were handled by the media has been a minor motif in campaign coverage.

Time's Margaret Carlson noted after New Hampshire the call for culling minor candidates from future debates. She seemed to object, advancing the offbeat view that politics should be some test of ad lib ability or even situation comedy.

For Republicans, she said, "there would be no spontaneity without the understaffed challengers." As for the charismatically challenged Gore-Bradley combo, she observed: "Just as Lucy and Desi needed the Mertzses, the Democrats could use a foil or two onstage."

At various points in the campaign, important media outlets hustled to catch up on the also-rans, especially on Keyes.

Perhaps the most thoughtful piece on Keyes ran in The Washington Post two days before the Iowa vote. It was by the Style section's political troubadour, Kevin Merida, who is black, and con-



Keyes jumps into a mosh pit in Des Moines, Iowa. Photo by M. Spencer Green, courtesy of AP Wide World Photos.

cluded with an assessment from historian Roger Wilkins of George Mason University, who is also black.

Wilkins objected to what he called Keyes's "almost profane" misuse of the slave metaphor, an objection sparked by several Keyes antebellum references, including a jibe at the Republican front-runner as "Massa Bush."

"There are few people who have run for President in my lifetime with slimmer credentials for doing so," Wilkins said. "Who is this guy?"

Bauer and Forbes dropped out in regular order, just like losers immemorial in Iowa and New Hampshire.

But Keyes, with nothing to lose and an ego to feed, pressed on, becoming a sort of Greek chorus playing against Bush and Sen. John McCain in the nationally televised (at least for cable subscribers) debates to which he continued to be invited.

In the Los Angeles debate in early March, Keyes was asked to explicate the limited success of his effort.

"You have been very eloquent through this campaign," noted questioner Doyle McManus, Washington Bureau Chief of the Los Angeles Times, but the Republican faithful "are not flocking to your standard."

"I'd be willing to bet a great many of them have no idea that I'm running

because of the media black-out on this campaign," said Keyes, reverting to his beloved indignation. "I've always found it interesting. You guys play the game: Put the mask over the eyes of the people and then ask why they don't see me."

Except for the racial dimension, Keyes was advancing the long-held view of minor candidates: No coverage

means no cash, no endorsements, no traction. It's admittedly fertile ground for a vicious circle, but for journalists, is there a requirement to provide the same playing field for a relative unknown as for an experienced senator or a big-state governor?

Keyes certainly had his view of the issue. In his summation in the Los Angeles debate, Keyes returned to one of his favorite themes.

"The one question that came up tonight is worth answering: Why am I here? You know the reason I'm honestly here? It's because with the majority of people in the Republican Party, I'm the sentimental favorite. I'm the one you're all listening to. You know I'm saying what's in your heart. You know that I speak the truth, the true bedrock conservatism.

"I do it better than anybody who has appeared in these debates, and it's the one reason that my colleagues did not feel that they had the strength to stand up and say, 'Kick him out.' You see, because they know that would rouse your ire."

Maybe. Maybe not. ■

Cragg Hines, Washington Bureau Chief of the Houston Chronicle, is covering his eighth presidential campaign.

'How I Hate the Media.'

For Jesse Ventura, disdain for media attention is selective.

By Mike Mulcahy

When Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura gave a speech to the Minnesota Society of Professional Journalists last May, he said he wanted to call it "I Hate the Media." But the title wasn't quite right, joked the governor, so he changed it to "How I Hate the Media." The reporters in the audience laughed, but for the dozen or so journalists who cover the governor regularly as part of the Minnesota capitol press corps, the joke has long since worn thin.

On election night, November of 1998, Ventura exclaimed that his Reform Party victory "shocked the world." It also shocked the state's political and journalistic establishment. The press certainly covered Ventura's campaign. He has acknowledged that the "free media" exposure he got in debates, on talk shows and in other forums, helped his underfunded effort gain the advantage over his more experienced and well-heeled opponents. But reporters covering that race never really expected Ventura to win. Until the closing weeks of the campaign, journalists generally treated him as an entertaining sideshow, as a diversion from the more serious candidates, Republican Mayor Norm Coleman and Democratic Attorney General Skip Humphrey.

For weeks after his surprise victory it was virtually impossible for anyone in Minnesota to turn on the radio, the TV, or to pick up a local newspaper without hearing, seeing or reading

something about their maverick new governor. It had become a feeding frenzy. And the media gorged themselves. This burst of excessive coverage might be one reason why the governor now complained that the media covers him only to sell papers and increase ratings.

Now, as Ventura is well into his second legislative session, relations between him and the press corps are openly hostile.

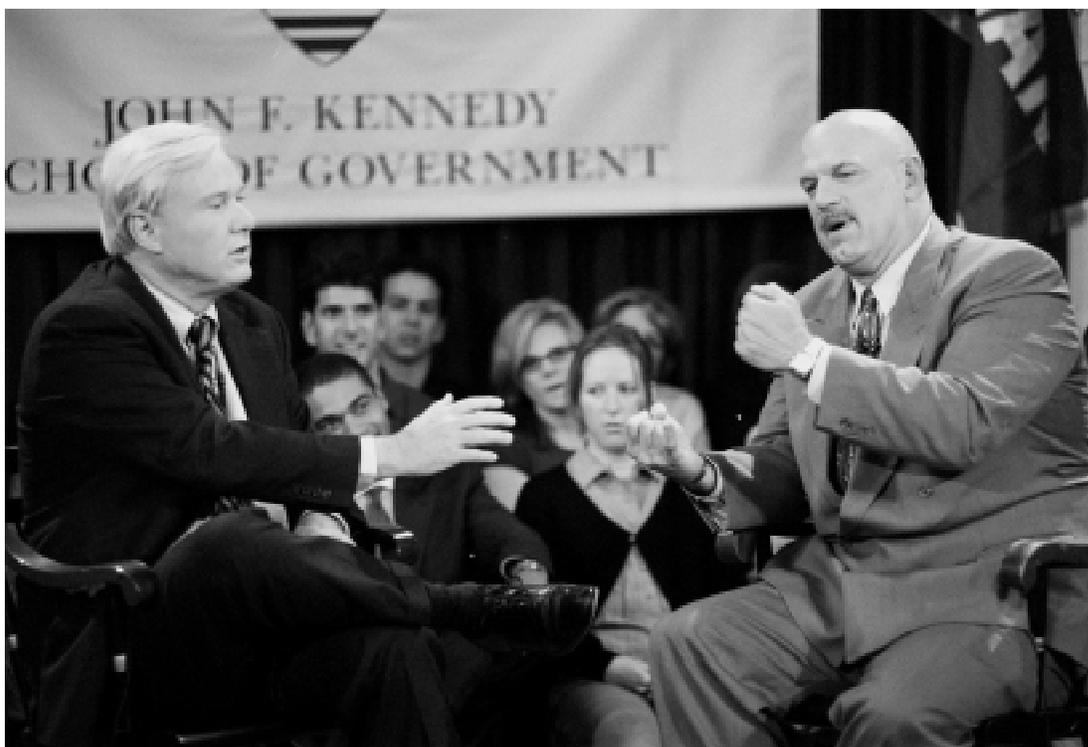
Jim Ragsdale, who has covered state government and politics for the St. Paul Pioneer Press since 1994, puts the blame for the rift on the governor. "He has a deep abiding mistrust of the media," says Ragsdale, "and the closer the

media is to him the more he distrusts them."

WCCO-TV reporter Pat Kessler has worked at the capitol for 15 years and covered four Minnesota governors. He says reporters have a love/hate relationship with Ventura. "We love him. He hates us."

Star Tribune reporter Robert Whereatt has covered the Minnesota capitol for nearly 30 years. Ventura, he says, "doesn't trust us. I don't think we've given him reason not to. His image has been aided by the media from the very start."

Friction between politicians and reporters is nothing new, but veteran journalists say it's different with



Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura (right) punches the air as he talks with CNBC television talk show host Chris Matthews at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government in October 1999. *Photo by Jon Chase/Harvard News Office.*

Ventura. The reporters' biggest complaint is that Ventura does not do interviews. Kessler keeps count. Since the beginning of the governor's term he has asked 44 times for a one-on-one interview. The governor has agreed three times. Kessler believes a part of the problem might be that he refuses to agree to ground rules the governor's office tries to set for the interviews. Ventura's press staff, Kessler says, has asked him to limit his questions to one topic or to provide questions in advance.

Kessler says it's a difficult situation, because Ventura is such good copy. "In any interview the governor will make news on three or four topics," he says, "and at least one of them will be controversial."

Minnesota reporters find it especially galling that while Ventura refuses to talk one-on-one with journalists who cover the daily workings of state government, he seems to go out of his way to do interviews with the national media. He's become a fixture on the Sunday morning TV talk shows and has appeared on shows such as "Regis and Kathie Lee" and "Montel."

Ironically, it was an interview with a national magazine, not the local press, which led to the biggest crisis in Ventura's 15 months in office. His popularity in statewide polls plunged after he told *Playboy* that he considered organized religion a "crutch for weak-minded people." In the interview he also labeled suicide victims weak and said that, if reincarnated, he would choose to come back as a 38 double-D bra. Ventura has since gained back some of the ground lost in the polls, but members of the legislature say the governor has lost much of the luster of his first year in office.

In a February speech to the Colorado Press Association, Ventura complained about how the local press reported the *Playboy* interview. He charged that it was "sloppy journalism" for headlines to say "Ventura Defends Tailhook Scandal." The governor said he made it clear in the interview he did not condone the Navy officers' conduct and that he could understand why some pilots who put their lives on

the line would consider sexual harassment allegations "much ado about nothing."

The St. Paul Pioneer Press's Ragsdale has noticed that frequently Ventura will refuse an interview with a local reporter on a topic he will then freely discuss on a national talk show. He says Ventura's popularity as a politician who is regarded as a national celebrity hurts Minnesota voters' chances to get more information on the governor's policy priorities. "The difference with Ventura" from previous governors, says Ragsdale, "is that his words are in demand. He has more interview requests than he could possibly accommodate, whereas most governors in the country would be happy to talk to the local paper to get their message out."

WCCO's Kessler says he believes Ventura is reluctant to talk to local reporters because he doesn't want to display his lack of knowledge about the intricacies of government. Kessler says Ventura is the hardest working governor he's covered, but that when he took office Ventura "knew almost nothing about how government operates." Kessler believes Ventura doesn't want to be publicly embarrassed, and that the national TV interviews are easier for the governor because they don't get into such details. "The first and second questions are fine," says Kessler. "It's the fourth and fifth he has trouble answering."

Not surprisingly, Jesse Ventura denied an interview request for this article. He has, however, given several speeches and made several comments about his relationship with the media. On a radio talk this month he complained, "They [the media] don't verify anything. If it's sexy, if it's titillating, they write it. It doesn't matter if it's true." The comment came in response to a question about how the governor can continue to say he returned the state's entire budget surplus to taxpayers last year, despite double-digit increases in state spending.

Ventura was a talk radio host after he retired from wrestling. He apparently is still an avid talk radio listener. He's worked out a unique arrangement with the Twin Cities' highest rated

radio station to do a weekly call-in program of his own called "Lunch With the Governor." Ventura isn't paid for doing the hour-long show, and WCCO-AM gets to keep the revenue from the commercials. The show is unusual because there is no co-host. The governor gets the entire hour to say whatever he wants in whatever way he wants.

Reporters hate the program. The Star Tribune's Robert Whereatt says, "It's unedited, unfiltered. Errors are allowed to go uncorrected. And it gives him an excuse not to talk to us."

That's exactly the reason why Ventura says he wanted to do the show. He says he didn't want his opinions to be filtered through the media. Earlier this year, state legislators who were upset with the governor's unchallenged criticism on his radio show persuaded WCCO's management to give them their own program. It will last a half-hour and follow Ventura's program every Friday.

Ventura's efforts to communicate directly with the voters seem to be working. The latest Minnesota Public Radio/St. Paul Pioneer Press Poll shows 52 percent of voters in the state rate his performance as good to excellent. Minnesota's economy continues to outperform the national economy and the state budget is running a \$1.8 billion surplus. Even the journalists who are upset with their lack of access to the governor aren't willing to say the public has suffered because of it. WCCO-TV's Kessler says, "Our viewers probably don't notice any difference. We will cover him. We will shout questions at his public appearances. But in the long term we will never know what he really thinks about the policies his administration is trying to enact." ■

Mike Mulcaby is Senior Political Editor at Minnesota Public Radio. He's covered politics and government in Minnesota for 15 years.

Connecting Political Coverage to Readers' Concerns

In local reporting, entertainment is a distant second to issues that touch people's lives.

By Mike Riley

If you want to make a list of the favorite platitudes of national political reporters, one phrase rises to the top: All politics is local.

At one time or another, nearly every national scribe, with a suitably somber face and furrowed brow, spits out that cliché, usually to explain to the great unwashed some critical twist of the campaign season. Those four magic words, which come to us courtesy of former Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill, who knew a thing or two about the business, have long served as a convenient catchall to explain a multitude of things political.

But here's a confession: When I covered national politics for *Time* magazine, I never fully appreciated the import of that phrase, although I often used it to wrap my mind—and others' minds—around the latest turn of events. It was only when I moved to the Blue Ridge Mountains of southwest Virginia to become editor of *The Roanoke Times* that the real meaning of that phrase became clear. When my political prism shifted from national to local—a tectonic shift in perspective—the power of O'Neill's words came into sharp focus. The chief lesson: Local is real; national is not. But more on that later.

Back in 1987, I fell into national political reporting when my boss at *Time* called me from New York and asked if I wanted to cover the upcoming presidential campaign. I nearly jumped out the window of the Los Angeles bureau, and offered up—with-

out hesitation, as I recall—a significant body part for that golden opportunity (thank God my boss didn't take me up on that aspect of the deal).

During the next 12 years, I covered national politics in one way or another. I crisscrossed the country with Michael Dukakis on Sky Pig, his bargain-basement jet. I stared in awe at Bill Clinton in 1992 as he survived Gennifer Flowers in New Hampshire. And then I created what's become the granddaddy of political Web sites, allpolitics.com,

stories gripping, the scandals momentous. In many ways, national politics—at least as we understand and report it—is pure theater, an entertaining spectacle played out largely inside the beltway amphitheater, with cameo appearances at key venues across the nation. On the TV news, the leading politicians have become protagonists, the distant cardboard cutouts who spout out sound bites. Most of what they say and do has little impact on real people; their words and actions are detached and disconnected; their brand of politics is anything but local.

The traditional formula we use to cover national politics—heavy on spectacle and light on substance (with enough token issues coverage thrown in along the way to pretend that we're taking it all quite seriously)—feeds that sense of disconnection, defined by the inability of politicians and citizens to carry on meaningful dialogues. In a presidential campaign, for example, real connections are possible only in a few places—namely Iowa and New Hampshire—and after that the campaign moves into a cocoon, with journalists acting as somewhat awkward and obfuscating filters. So it's easy to get dispirited while covering that superficial sort of campaign.

In hopes that the Internet offered an opportunity to reconnect these disparate parties, I jumped at the chance in 1995 to build and run allpolitics.com, which I thought offered a high-tech chance to bridge that great disconnect.



George W. Bush at the Roanoke City Market. *Photo by Natalee Waters, The Roanoke Times.*

for *Time* and CNN, which allowed me to watch, in grainy streaming video on my computer, as President Clinton barely survived Monica Lewinsky.

Covering politics at the national level was a blast, and seemed, at times, a grand game, almost too fun to be real. The personalities were fascinating, the

The idea was to cover all the political news, as broadly and as deeply as we could. We would have no more pure fluff at the expense of substance. Because we weren't constrained by newsprint costs or airtime, we had a virtually unlimited ability to focus on issues we thought were important. So, in addition to covering the traditional stories of the day, we could spend time exploring not-so-sexy-but-darn-important issues such as welfare and campaign finance reform. The site featured lots of interactivity, including message boards and chat rooms, which we hoped would build communities of interest and start reconnecting people to the political process.

Traffic grew and, when we posted the first real-time election results on line during election night 1996, we glimpsed the huge impact and potential of politics on the Internet.

But not everyone saw our potential as clearly. The site failed to bring in much money, and corporate interest waned. Then came the Lewinsky story which, while it drove millions of page views each day, also confirmed that the soap opera of politics could once again trump any notions of substance. When I drove to work those mornings, I literally dreaded spending another day covering the sordid saga, knowing that people seemed far more concerned about the latest titillation of Monica and Bill than about any story of import.

That was about the time I headed to Roanoke, trading the nomadic life of covering national news for a close-knit community where my family and I could put roots down. And it was here that I began to finally understand just what Tip O'Neill was talking about.

Politicians here aren't cardboard cutouts (though some of them are certainly characters); nor are they the daily butt of David Letterman jokes. Instead, they're the real thing. You run into them while shopping at the City Market or eating at The Roanoker restaurant. They live down the street or in a nearby neighborhood. Their kids go to school with your kids. There is a human scale to these politicians—they're approachable—and they like it that way. So do their constituents, who are our

readers, and that means we cover politics here in a radically different way.

We avoid publishing horserace stories (for the most part), along with the rumors, the gossip, and innuendo. Here, politics is not a sport or an entertainment, which meant that the Clinton impeachment news rarely made the front page. Instead, our coverage of politics is defined by issues that hit home, that touch the lives of our readers. We closely cover the city council, whether it's wrestling with a water shortage or creating a ruckus by changing the date for trick-or-treating. We keep a close eye on our state legislators as they battle for regional road projects, argue about whether high school students can carry hunting rifles in their trucks on school property, or try to find ways to help laid-off textile workers. These are bread-and-butter issues with real regional impact, and that's what we want to cover on our pages.

In Roanoke, we waited a long time before putting presidential primary stories on the front page, even though we played plenty of them inside. And there were days when I had to muffle my instinctive love of national politics to keep from pressing to play more of these political stories more prominently. I realized, however, that most of our readers simply weren't hungry for them and that we could use the news hole in far better ways.

When George W. Bush came through our town, we certainly covered him. And our reporters wrote a few on-the-ground-with-local-organizers stories, but otherwise we relied on wire service reports for our coverage. We'd troll through wire copy, however, looking for meaningful analysis rather than coverage of the controversy of the day. In the fall, we will focus primarily on the already antagonistic Robb-Allen senate race. This hits home with our audience. And we'll track the presidential race through the wires.

At this level, it's possible to see more clearly how representative democracy is meant to work. It's good for politicians to live in the community and rub shoulders with real constituents, rather than spending much of their time courting deep-pocketed donors. That close-

ness builds a fair amount of accountability, because people here can reach out and touch their politicians to keep them in line.

The newspaper's role is straightforward: Keep the conversation honest by closely following politics as it touches the lives of real people. That's a sharply focused litmus test for our coverage, and most of the time it works well. I'm sure there's some sagacious Greek philosopher who put it better, but it's clear that democracy works best when the distance between the governors and the governed is least.

So on the way from Washington to Roanoke, I've learned plenty of journalistic lessons:

- Local politics is real and human and immensely complex. It has a direct and powerful impact on people's lives. And it deserves serious, sustained coverage.
- The newspaper has a responsibility to cover all the important issues and to explain their impact in a meaningful way. That's a purpose easily shirked at the national level. The stakes here are high, because if we fail to cover our politics well, nobody else will.
- Readers here want hard results and understanding, not frothy entertainment. They care deeply about the future of their region, and their concern keeps both the newspaper and politicians honest.

Now, don't get me wrong. I haven't yet given up on the Internet. I'm still rooting for it to revolutionize politics in 2000, or 2004, or 2008, and I know it will one day allow us to play a more powerful role in this region. While I'd love to see the Internet empower and connect people in the best possible ways, the odds of that happening immediately are pretty slight. So, for right now, I know I'm in a place where the daily newspaper can have plenty of impact, and that's a great feeling. ■

Mike Riley, a former bureau chief for Time and Executive Producer of allpolitics.com, is Editor of The Roanoke (Va.) Times.

From the Political Biosphere Into Cyberspace

A Journalist's Journey From Television to the Web

By Kathleen deLaski

1992

Covering a campaign as a TV reporter is like being sequestered in a biosphere. After a while, you can't remember how to relate to the outside world. In 1992, I kissed my family goodbye and trailed George Bush (the dad) as an ABC News correspondent for nine months. The hardest part was trying to figure out what average people would want or need to learn each day from the campaign, those people who went about their daily lives outside of this voter-free bubble in which we traveled. Bear in mind that, for "World News Tonight" or "Good Morning America," I usually had one minute and 15 seconds to sum up the day. That's five sentences. (I'd be done right now if this were my TV report.)

Always in pursuit of a new angle, our video Cliffs Notes often focused on symbolism or tactics of the campaign that wouldn't help the less than hardcore voter make a decision, unless the viewer watched our pieces faithfully. And we didn't kid ourselves that they did. Our public was the press plane. We held court in the sky as we dined on filet mignon and chased Air Force One to the next battle. Once, after our filing deadline, we had an airplane pillow fight. From press plane to bus to staged campaign event to hotel, we had no contact with real voters. The only contact we had was with "supporters" who would poke us with the blunt end of those American flags they hand out at rallies to drive home the President's campaign slogan, "Annoy the Media, Re-Elect George Bush."

I feel like I made some important contributions to TV journalism during my 13 years on the road. None of them, however, came from my year in that biosphere.

1996

By 1996, the fine dining was gone, along with the driver to get me to my "Good Morning America" live shots. When Ted Koppel left the GOP convention in disgust that summer, saying that there was no story and the parties were just trying to manipulate the media, I was having an epiphany of the opposite sort.

Now heading up political coverage for America Online, I was hunched over my laptop in the nosebleed seats in the GOP convention hall, responding to questions from voters in real-time. We ran live "help" chat rooms to decipher the speeches, where experts explained what was really going on, their comments driven by the live questions from voters.

While Koppel worried about feeling manipulated, we could put voters in the control room and let them shape their own experiences based on their own definitions of news. At AOL, for example, we invited subscribers to rate the speeches (Colin Powell beat Elizabeth Dole). We independently solicited delegates from the Democratic, Republican and Libertarian conventions to write daily diaries and managed to cut through the "message of the day." At the GOP convention, the Republican Party downplayed the platform that got approved, in part because of the squishy compromise language on abortion. The GOP Web site buried the platform. On our site, when members kept asking for it, we linked directly to it from our front politics page.

While our audience was still very small and not yet mainstream in 1996, I realized that what I had been carefully cramming into my TV spots was not what voters were looking for. The rat-

ings or "page views" in the Politics section of AOL told us that wired voters, at least, wanted facts. Not inside baseball. Not spin. Not candidate speeches. Not candidate ads. Not the latest polls. Not even to have issues carefully explained. Bare-bone information, quickly and conveniently.

2000

Just before this year's New Hampshire primary, there was a farewell party for veteran journalist Jack Germond at the famous watering hole, the Wayfarer Bar, south of Manchester. He said on CNN recently that campaign reporting and being a boy on the bus is no fun anymore, what with everyone typing away on their laptops all day long and nonstop deadlines. He said this would be his last campaign.

Indeed, laptops and technology have made the political campaign a wholly different experience. The press marveled at the Internet voting experiment in Arizona's Democratic primary, and John McCain showed how effectively a Web site could turn his "big mo" after New Hampshire and Michigan into six million dollars in cyberspace donations, circumventing the GOP party machine that had already elected George W. Bush.

What has also been interesting this year is the number of dot.com startups that are flooding into politics, backed by lots of venture capital—Vote.com, Voter.com, GoVote.com, Election.com, Grassroots.com, and Politics.com. Most of the editors of these sites would argue they have a journalistic mission, at least in part, but what they really want to do is reinvent the voters' relationship with politics. To the extent that these sites

have more money to spend this year than the news sites they compete with such as [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com) and [CNN.com](http://www.cnn.com), political journalism could look very different by 2004.

The Dot.com Era of Political Reporting

At AOL, we are a hybrid operation. We have an online newsroom that aggregates traditional news sources into packages for our 22 million members. And we have people like myself who are building out “vertical markets” such as politics and government.

My role is to develop interactive tools, ways for citizens to interact with information or government officials and agencies in a convenient fashion. Some examples include zip code look-up directories to help voters figure out who is running for local offices, a weekly “people’s press conference” with the White House (“Ask the White House”), and even online government services such as driver’s license renewal or product recall information.

I find that I feel compelled to deliver more of a public service than I would have thought appropriate as a network TV correspondent. I offer two examples. One is BeAVoter.org, an online voter registration drive that AOL has developed this year with partners MCIWorld.com and [AARP](http://AARP.org). While some newsrooms might argue that this crosses the line, because encouraging registration is stepping into the process, I felt it was core to our convenience mission to make voting easier and more likely.

AOL’s most heavily trafficked voter service this year is President Match. (AOL Keyword: President Match, or www.presidentmatch.com.) A joint project with CBS News, it is an interac-

tive quiz that helps users to match their own views with those of the candidates. People find it interesting and useful because it strips away their preconceived notions about who is most electable or charismatic and ranks the candidates purely on the issues.

The Internet will be even more useful in helping voters get similar information at the state and local level. As a voter, I always feel a little ashamed checking boxes for local candidates when I know nothing about them. The way most news sites are set up now,



The author conducts an Internet live chat with George W. Bush. *Photo courtesy of America Online.*

this fall you’ll be able to type in your zip code and in many cases be able to get information about candidates running even at your local level. Since most local political jurisdictions don’t map easily to zip codes, the real promise of convenient, consistent access to information that helps you choose among local candidates may not be fully realized until the next cycle.

The other big difference in my journalistic life now is that I am not a celebrity, or “talent,” as TV reporters are called by producers and cameramen. I was never a star, but I got recognized in the grocery store, and my grandmother would gather all her

pals around the retirement home to watch my pieces on the evening news.

During the course of this campaign, we have conducted live interviews with all the major presidential candidates, so even though I have moderated most of these events, I do it under an online alias, “AOLVotes.” My role is to screen questions from the public and choose which ones get asked to the candidate. I try to resist the urge to ask the incisive follow-up unless the candidate hasn’t answered the question.

It’s very humbling.

My husband asked me this morning, when filling out our tax return, “What should I put for you under Occupation? Are you still a journalist?”

I hesitated. “Not really.”

He pushed, “Well, what should I put?”

I don’t know. I ran into an old AOL friend who went to another Internet company. He said his new title there is VP of Information Architecture. That sounds pretty good. ■

Kathleen deLaski, a former ABC News political correspondent, is now overseeing America Online’s coverage of politics and government.

Multimedia Coverage of the Interactive Kind

At OnPolitics, partnerships and public engagement change the way political news is delivered and digested.

By Mark Stencel

To cover New Hampshire's quadrennial presidential primary, a newspaper reporter once could get by with little more than a notebook and a felt tip pen. Felt tips don't freeze like ballpoints do on a February evening in the Granite State. But the multimedia team that The Washington Post's Web site sent to New Hampshire in 2000 needed more than reliable writing implements to do their jobs.

Among the gear they carried: laptop computers equipped to host live online discussions and edit video clips, even in the back of a moving rental car, and a digital video camera for quickly capturing images and audio that were uploaded to the Web site through a modem or cell phone.

OnPolitics, washingtonpost.com's campaign news channel, is more than the newspaper's coverage of Campaign 2000 repackaged for Web readers. It is an ongoing research and development effort that has effectively turned the newspaper's respected political staff into multimedia reporters, filing breaking news reports, answering reader questions in live online auditoriums, and standing in front of video cameras to offer instant analysis. It has also become a platform for experiments in original online features, including news, analysis and information that are not available to readers who exclusively get their news from the Post's pulp and ink edition.

The Washington Post's online coverage is the product of all the newspaper's established expertise in election news and more than four years of covering national politics online, including experience drawn from two presidential campaigns, a national midterm election, and a presidential impeachment trial. Among the lessons we

have drawn from those stories are a series of key attributes that may have broad application in online journalism, whether the topic is politics, sports, business, science or local news.

Breaking News

The most current headlines are still among the biggest draws to any online news site. This has usually meant offering the most recent stories fed off the wires or, at best, hiring modest staffs to serve as old-fashioned rewrite desks, re-crafting wire and TV reports. In this model, the number of writers and the amount of daily news they were expected to generate often limited the amount of original reporting and duplicated work that was already being done elsewhere within a news organization.

During the 1998-1999 impeachment saga, washingtonpost.com was able to offer news reports from the next day's newspaper nearly half a day earlier than they were available in print for most readers. Eventually the Post's White House reporter at the time, Peter Baker, began filing midday updates that were published on the Web site, sometimes several times a day.

Other sites tried to do similar things. After two newspapers had to withdraw exclusive stories they'd published online, we set up a rule that has become the guiding principle of our site: We'd rather be right than first. We extended this rule to our news wire reports as well, holding off on publishing stories based on unnamed sources unless the information was confirmed by our own reporting.

After the impeachment trial, washingtonpost.com formalized this

collaboration with the newspaper, launching a five-day-a-week afternoon edition exclusively on the Web. During the presidential primaries, Post reporters traveling with the candidates filed as many as four stories a day, some of which never made it into the print edition. On occasion, Post reporters have also produced original stories for the Web after deadline, when an evening speech or fundraiser was too late to make it into the next morning's newspaper. The reporters have also provided enhancements for the online versions of their stories, such as transcripts of candidate speeches or interviews.

The Post's mission is still to produce the most authoritative news reporting that deadlines allow, and that depth and analysis is also one of the Web site's biggest selling points. Creative use of talent and time can minimize any disruption to the work of the paper's political staff. On primary nights, for example, one staff writer filed a running news story until the version another staff writer produced for the print edition was available to publish online. This allowed us to give our readers the Post's most current information on a breaking story without taking time away from the reporting that eventually went into the newspaper.

Interactivity and Databases

The Web is an interactive medium, which means news sites must provide readers with something to do. Washingtonpost.com offers opportunity for the same kind of unedited discussion areas that many Web sites do. The site also provides more struc-

tured "Live Online" interviews with Post reporters and editors, newsmakers and experts. White House officials, members of Congress, and governors are regular guests on OnPolitics, which hosts at least one of these discussions most days of the week. These interviews are conducted Larry King-style, with readers submitting the bulk of the questions and online hosts, including Post reporters and columnists, moderating and asking follow-up questions.

We have resisted featuring the kind of online polls that appear on many Web sites. These self-selected "surveys" are enormously popular, driving a lot of traffic with very little effort. But the data they produce are absolutely meaningless—and even misleading. The Post invests too much in its more scientific and more reliable random telephone surveys to risk diluting their value and confusing readers by putting the Post's name on bad data. Instead, OnPolitics poses interactive "Poll Taker" questions: Readers submit their answers to questions asked in actual Post polls and then their answers are compared with the real survey data. Readers can also compare their answers to demographic subgroups, reorganizing the data by education, income, gender and race.

Interactivity doesn't always involve complex databases and specialized programs. OnPolitics offers a weekly online column written by Ken Rudin, a long-time political editor at National Public Radio, and based on reader questions. The topics include campaign buzz, trivia and political history. And the only technology required to produce Rudin's interactive column is e-mail.

Multimedia

The Web is prompting new approaches to political coverage throughout the industry. Newspaper editors are thinking more like TV producers,

just as TV news reporters are having to think more like their print counterparts. It's not that all types of coverage are converging at some particular point, but rather that the presence of new possibilities is changing the way that members of all media think about reaching an audience.

OnPolitics displays news video from a variety of sources, including the use of a syndicated search engine of presi-

offer a new kind of interactive multimedia experience. Given a chance to conduct a brief video interview with Texas Gov. George W. Bush during a campaign swing through northern Virginia, we asked our readers to submit the questions. In less than 12 hours, there were more than 1,000 to choose from, most of them far more issue-oriented than those usually asked by campaign reporters. I conducted the interview, picking five representative questions and then asking my own follow-ups. This format combined the best qualities of our interactive discussions with our increasing skills as video producers and will be a key component of OnPolitics coverage during the general election.

Partnerships

All of these features would be hard for a strictly online news organization to produce on its own. The key for washingtonpost.com has been its imaginative partnerships. Some of these arrangements resemble the traditional media's model of syndication, while others are breaking new ground in the use of this technology in political coverage.

Our video search engine comes from C-SPAN, which syndicates its election coverage through a California company called Virage Inc. We also get campaign video through a partnership with MSNBC which, as part of the arrangement, publishes Washington Post stories on its Web site. OnPolitics licenses the information we need to maintain our database on the gubernatorial and congressional races from Congressional Quarterly. That information also includes CQ's "risk rating" on the nearly 500 contests this year, as well as its background material on the summer's national party conventions. OnPolitics also features all of CQ's comprehensive news coverage of these races, with as many as a half dozen stories a day.

The competitive marketplace for first-class technologists means



dential candidate video from C-SPAN. During the presidential primaries, OnPolitics got into the business of producing its own campaign video, too, sending small video teams—a cameraperson and an editorial producer—to Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and California. The Post political reporters on the trail served as "on-air talent," offering daily "stand-up" news reports on the candidates' activities and the direction of the campaign. Montages of man-on-the-street and polling-place interviews gave washingtonpost.com readers a chance to see and hear real voters discuss their choice for their parties' nominees. There were also video interviews with local politicians and party officials.

Toward the end of the accelerated primary season, OnPolitics was able to

OnPolitics also depends on heavily high-tech partners for some features. Working with a California company called SearchButton, for example, we are able to offer our readers a searchable index of candidate Web sites: Type in "education," for example, and find the most relevant pages on each of the presidential candidates' sites. In this case, our partner collaborated with us by building this search feature as a way of demonstrating the abilities of their technology. Regardless of the business model, each of our partnerships give OnPolitics features and content that we could probably not afford to produce in-house.

Links

Links are still the foundation of hypertext, the language in which the Web is written. Links are what allow readers to easily click back and forth among all the features described above. Linking to other sites, including competitors, is also a key feature.

"Early Returns," a two-year-old daily column on washingtonpost.com, wraps

up political news culled by a producer/writer each morning from more than 100 other news sites. We do not mind linking to other news organizations because we know that our readers appreciate the time we save them by sifting out significant political developments. By going through 100 sites, we save them time, an increasingly precious commodity in an era of information overload. Links to candidate and interest group Web sites, as well as the ability to connect easily to related and archival coverage on our own site, are also prominently featured in our news stories and across the site.

The Web is quickly changing the way news organizations such as The Washington Post cover campaigns. Collaborations between print and online newsrooms are establishing new traditions and pioneering new models for gathering the news. In the long run, these journalistic experiments, at the Post and elsewhere, may have as much influence on national political coverage as the live TV reports from the national party conventions during the late 1940's and 1950's.

The speed of the Web poses great challenges to the fundamentals of journalism, especially to fairness and accuracy. Editorial decisions are often made at what seems like the speed of light. At the same time, the interactive nature of the Web offers new opportunities for disenchanted readers and viewers to reconnect with political news and even to reshape and customize it.

The Web requires fresh thinking about how news can be delivered and, in turn, how it is received and absorbed. Traditional news organizations that mistakenly treat their online operations as virtual printing plants or online transmitters risk being left behind. Those that embrace this new medium, however, have a chance to combine the best practice and traditions of print and on-air reporting. Campaign 2000 is a perfect incubator for this new kind of journalism. ■

Mark Stencel, Editor of washingtonpost.com's OnPolitics, is the co-author of "Peepshow: Media and Politics in an Age of Scandal" (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

The Fun and Frenzy of Internet Political Coverage

At Salon.com, reporting is wrapped in attitude and the writing is edgier.

By Jake Tapper

If you transported yourself back to Dartmouth in 1991 (when I was trying to decide what to do with my life) and you told me that soon I would be running around the country with various presidential candidates, writing and reporting basically whatever catches my fancy about both the candidates and their campaigns, typing out magazine-style articles with attitude and occasional literary flourish for Salon.com, I would have feared I'd taken one too many bong hits (a likely assessment at that stage in my history). And the fact that a publication like

Salon could exist, through this wonderful new technology called the "Internet," that would allow the magazine to appear on tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of people's computer screens every morning (1.7 million readers a month)—that, too, would have seemed more science fiction than journalistic fact.

But it's been one hell of a ride, and my experience has been one that only a handful of others—at Slate.com and Nationalreview.com, to name two competitors—have been able to experience. My job with Salon.com has permitted

me entrée into this world of political coverage in a nearly unprecedented fashion, unprecedented because of what I can write and the immediacy with which I can write it. This is a medium that, by many accounts, has changed how campaigns are covered.

For example, there was George W. Bush's ill-fated trip to Bob Jones University (where Catholicism is bashed and interracial dating was banned) which, at first, registered as a blip in the national media coverage of his post-New Hampshire excursion to South Carolina. The mainstream media has a

fairly high tolerance for bigotry if it doesn't come wrapped in a sheet, so that didn't surprise me. But now I could try to do something about it.

So Salon.com ran into the story, face forward, ready to rumble, and produced "Jonesing for Votes" on February 3—a story widely circulated, linked among news portals, and cited in the all-important political "Hotline" newsletter. The obvious offensiveness of Bush's trip was soon pushed to greater prominence. The edge provided by Internet publications—with their combination of magazine attitude and better than newspaper publication deadlines—has allowed edgier writing and edgier issues to slice politicians with more than paper cut-size stings. And we can do so as news develops, as a recent study by the Committee of Concerned Journalists assessed, hailing Salon for its productivity. As the Committee's study noted, "One can only wonder how much caffeine Salon reporters ingest since all the stories were staff written, most were lengthy, and sometimes the same reporter posted multiple stories a day." (The answer to the caffeine query is: a lot. My heart beats like a hummingbird's.)

The ability to tell it like it really is—almost immediately—was the initial reason why the campaign of *the* political story of the year, John McCain, started giving me access. After McCain's campaign kickoff, the senator's chief of staff, who had been reluctant to even give me an initial interview with the candidate, suddenly was heralding my work. My story was the only one that really got what the McCain campaign was trying to say, in the subtext.

"While never mentioning his GOP rival by name," I wrote on September 28, 1999, "McCain's speech today implied that Bush was a glib, inexperienced lightweight.... The message, if effectively conveyed, will transmit the following: McCain deep, Bush shallow. McCain conservative, Bush squishy. McCain Vietnam War hero, Bush rich-boy National Guardsman. McCain bold, Bush lame. McCain open and honest about his sins, Bush obfuscatory. And in the end, McCain hopes voters will eventually conclude: McCain strong, Bush weak."

Thus, my future access into the world according to McCain wasn't because I was a better writer than my peers, but rather because Salon.com, as one of the leading magazines for an entirely new media, didn't have any centuries-old rules to which we needed to adhere. Sometimes this got me and others at Salon into trouble. But other times it allowed us to provide our readers with a no-holds-barred account that few mainstream media outlets were able to duplicate.

Soon other reporters were griping (understandably) about the no-name Internet journalist given his own bunk on the Straight Talk Express and allowed into the hotel room where McCain watched election returns. It was an amazing front row seat. Our coverage was able to be second to none, at least in terms of immediacy and access.

Sometimes that didn't work out so well for McCain, as when he continued to insist on the appropriateness of using the word "gook" to describe his North Vietnamese captors. Others reported the story, though again, most of them did so just as a sentence in a larger, duller piece. But even those who were on their game were beaten by Salon just because we were able to go up with the story only hours after the epithet crossed his lips. McCain made the remarks one morning, my story was up by that afternoon, and that night TV stations on the West Coast were reporting that "Jake Tapper from Salon was reporting" McCain's continued use of the slur.

Truth is, I hadn't even heard McCain use the word. A reporter from the San Jose Mercury News had been asking McCain about the word while I was flying south from D.C. I met up with the campaign somewhere in Charleston and asked a buddy, T. Christian Miller of the Los Angeles Times, what I had missed. He told me and let me hear his recording of that morning's "gook" comments. But because of the 'Net, it became my scoop, San Jose Mercury News reporter be damned.

Learning how to make the best use of the Web was not easy at first. And, by extension, others learned how to make use of me. In the crunch days of the

primaries, an ally of McCain gave me a scoop that made Bush look like a real mean SOB, and the Web was the best way to get the story out there, the best medium for the message. Bush was running an irresponsible radio ad in New York insinuating that McCain was indifferent to breast cancer research because he'd questioned the process through which some of the research programs were funded. But as a McCain family friend leaked to me, McCain's older sister was a breast cancer survivor, so Bush's ad wasn't just scurrilous, it was kind of insensitive. From the perspective of this source, was there enough time to get this story out there before it was too late to affect the fast-approaching New York primary?

Sure there was, if you used the Internet. I got the story and it went up hours later, far too late for a newspaper or non-cable TV network to do anything with it that day. However, by the next morning, Bush was grilled about it and gave an indifferent response, thus further confirming to observers (and certainly to McCain and his wife) that he was completely ruthless. It was an adventure, and it was a footnote in an exciting political story, and it was a blast. (McCain's older sister, it should be said, is doing quite well.)

There were times that I maybe didn't seem ready for prime time. I can be rude and brash, and some media critics sniped at leads I'd written. For instance, I wrote that the Iowa caucuses were "stinky," which they were, with Iowans in sweaters and coats in overheated rooms having overheated debates. In my rush to have an edge and be different from the pack, I also made literary missteps, no doubt, and I wince when I read stories I wrote a few months ago.

In our rush to push the envelope, Salon.com and I sometimes hurdled entirely outside the world of stationery altogether. It isn't easy to make political news all fun and informative to read about. But at least we're trying. God knows the staid worlds of politics and journalism could do with some shaking up. ■

Jake Tapper is Washington Correspondent for Salon.com.

Keeping a Reporter's Eye on the Contributions

It's easier to find the money, but does the public still want to know?

By Peter Overby

Every presidential campaign has an issue or two popping up and surprising us. In the 2000 presidential primary season, the Cinderella issue was the political influence of money.

Here's an issue beloved by few—mostly good government groups and newspaper editorial boards. Poll after poll has shown that the phrase “campaign finance reform” doesn't stir voters' civic souls; it makes them want to yawn. Politicians have maintained a Mafia-like omerta when reporters start asking how campaign cash materializes and, heaven forbid, how it might influence the donor-recipient relationship. As an aide to a House leader once said, explaining why I couldn't get in to see her congressman work the crowd, “We know what kind of stories you do. You do money stories.”

But for a time this winter, it seemed that nobody on the campaign trail could stop talking about money, and not just on John McCain's Straight Talk Express. It was all about soft money—the unregulated contributions from corporations, unions and millionaires that, in the 1990's, came to dominate American politics. McCain, of course, wants to make soft money illegal. Going back to last summer, when the Express was a dirty blue rental van, he managed to transform soft money from an everybody-does-it non-issue into a question of character. The way candidate and voters discussed it, there seemed to be only a thin line separating Clinton-style fundraising and other Clinton-style misbehavior.

Former Senator Bill Bradley was working the same argument, if less effectively, and other candidates caught on. Vice President Al Gore—he of the Buddhist temple fundraising and “no controlling legal authority”—became



Bill Bradley and John McCain joke after jointly endorsing campaign finance reform in Claremont, New Hampshire. *Photo by Reba Saldanha.*

a repentant sinner, promising to dismantle the money system he and President Clinton worked so hard for four years ago. Texas Governor George W. Bush was “a reformer with results,” even though he'd previously dismissed political money as an insignificant issue. Challenged by McCain's soft money ban, Bush tried to split the difference by declaring soft money from corporations and unions bad, but soft money from millionaires good. Even Gary Bauer and Alan Keyes—candidates destined never to smudge the ink on a newly written six-figure soft money check—felt obliged to stake out positions.

Gradually, reporters realized they no longer had to crank out the once mandatory “What is soft money?” sidebar.

Political scientist Diana Dwyre, co-author of an upcoming book on the battle over campaign finance reform,

says media coverage of political money will never be the same. “I think that we're going to have a lot more discussion, and a lot more watching of the whole soft money game this time around,” says Dwyre, a political scientist at California State University at Chico. “Before, I think people [in the media] were trying to figure out what is this stuff, how is it spent, what's an issue ad, why is it considered to be sort of on the edges of law.”

Now, says Dwyre, “Every reporter understands what soft money is.”

The money-and-politics boomlet isn't the doing of a single ambitious and engaging senator from Arizona. The past decade has seen accelerating changes in the way the beat is covered. Money-trail stories that once were a mainstay of a few investigative magazines now appear regularly in daily coverage. And it doesn't take an I-team to identify the biggest reason why: com-

puters and the Internet.

Ten years ago, I started my first big campaign finance story—a look at the state-level political action committees run by some members of Congress. We called them “back-pocket PAC’s” (political action committees run for the benefit of a federal candidate or candidate-wannabe). Now, as they’ve proliferated, they’re commonly known as “soft money leadership PAC’s.” Whatever you call them, they let lawmakers get around those irritating disclosure mandates and fundraising limits in Washington.

Back then, just locating these PAC’s took weeks of legwork. An official at the Federal Election Commission [FEC] shared an informal list of leadership PAC’s. Armed with the list, I started calling state capitals. Most states had little or no PAC disclosure. Those that did wanted a check in the mail before sending off photocopies.

Today, most of that story can be done online. Some Web sites let you aggregate contributions that a donor might spread around to a politician’s various committees. Others collect data from state campaign finance agencies. [See accompanying box, Money and Politics on the Web.]

Still, political money coverage shouldn’t be considered an indoor sport. Tracing the money trail from the donors remains only the first step, to be followed by document searches, coverage of fundraising events (especially those closed to the press), plus interviews and more interviews. On the other sides of the money-and-politics equation, political committee spending data and lobbying records are only slowly finding their way into online databases.

And many of us still are not savvy, aggressive and insightful with the data and other information that we are now able to amass. People inside and outside of journalism describe the beat interchangeably as “campaign finance” and “campaign finance reform.” The two phrases aren’t synonymous, of course; one is reporting, the other is advocacy. But it seems the more a journalist thinks of the beat as “campaign finance reform,” the more he or she

Money and Politics on the Web

The information revolution has brought an array of Web sites that collect, combine and otherwise buff up the campaign finance reports filed by candidates, political committees, and interest groups. Among the best:

(www.fec.gov) The Federal Election Commission offers contribution data on all federal candidates, party committees, and PAC’s. Also: periodic reports from FEC analysts on money trends in federal campaigns and Web links to state election agencies.

Among private Web sites:

(www.tray.com) FECInfo is the most easily searchable, by donor or recipient. This spring, FECInfo was splitting into a free Web site for basic searches and a subscription service, FECInfo Pro, with merged data from FEC filings and lobbyists’ reports.

(www.opensecrets.org) The Center for Responsive Politics has a variety of databases and specializes in sorting donors by economic sector.

(www.campaignstudygroup.com) The Campaign Study Group refines and analyzes FEC data, mostly for paid subscribers.

(www.publicintegrity.org) The Center for Public Integrity does investigative reports—most recently, a book chronicling the career-long fundraising habits of the presidential candidates—and puts much of its material online.

(www.followthemoney.org) The National Institute on Money in State Politics doggedly builds databases of state-level political money. One highlight: donor lists from George W. Bush’s gubernatorial campaigns.

(www.campaignfinance.org) Campaign Finance Information Center, operated by Investigative Reporters and Editors and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting, has a database combining contribution data from Washington and some states.

Several reform groups also have useful Web sites. Two worth noting are:

(www.commoncause.org) Common Cause and

(www.publiccampaign.org) Public Campaign.

It’s harder to find Web sites by anti-reform groups—those arguing that money isn’t so influential, that reform proposals are biased to help Democrats, or that big contributions are a First Amendment right.

(www.nationalcenter.org) The National Center for Public Policy Research used to publish the Political Money Monitor. But the most recent PMM on the Web site is dated August 1999. ■

moves into gotcha journalism.

Take the story of McCain’s relationship with Paxson Communications. The senator accepted money contributions and cut-rate rides on the Paxson corporate jet. Paxson got McCain’s successful effort to force the Federal Communications Commission to vote on the buyout of a public TV station—a vote that went in Paxson’s favor. After The Boston Globe broke the story, the big

question was whether it made McCain a reform hypocrite. Few of us spent much time chasing the systemic question: Why does election law allow CEO’s to underwrite political travel?

It’s a sweet little loophole, benefiting candidate and CEO alike, and all for the cost of a first-class ticket. Most of us—me included—gave short shrift to two facts: first, that McCain was hardly the only presidential hopeful

flying the friendly corporate skies, and second, that the loophole permits what amount to in-kind soft money contributions directly to the candidates. (Regular soft money operates under the fig leaf that contributions go to the party committees rather than to candidates themselves.)

Or take the matter of George W. Bush's online financial disclosure. Last September, the campaign put its donor records onto its Web site. It quoted the candidate as saying: "Americans will be able to look for themselves to find out who is helping to fund my campaign." The press release was headlined: "Governor Bush takes lead on campaign finance reform."

Is this real reform? Aside from the philosophical question Bush posed (there's anecdotal evidence that disclosure minus reform makes voters more cynical), journalists ought to question the quality of Bush's disclosure. The Web site permits searches only by donor's name, dollar amount or date. You can't do the three types of

searches essential for any real analysis of where the money comes from: a donor's occupation, employer and location. For that information, interested parties still have to wait until Bush files with the FEC—just like all the other candidates.

As the primary campaign segued into the general election contest this spring, we suddenly seemed to be right back where Campaign '96 had left us—listening to a shrill debate over reform, conducted by two candidates who'd avoided the issue until outside forces pushed them into embracing it. In 1996, conventional wisdom held that voters couldn't care less, and as the Democratic fundraising scandal spawned investigations and hearings, our coverage came to reflect that jaundiced view. By the time Senator Fred Thompson gavelled the first hearing to order, the scandal story line has been replaced by one focused mostly on partisan strategy and spin.

This time around, a newly emerged constituency of McCain and Bradley

voters demonstrably does care. So while we on the political money beat pore over our databases and study lobbyists' disclosure forms, there is another question to consider. Will reporters, editors and the public tire of this new emphasis on big money's political influence?

Or did the 1996 campaign turn us toward a new, Mark Hanna-based style of political coverage? It was Hanna, the engineer of William McKinley's political career, who said 105 years ago, "There are two things that are important in politics. The first is money, and I can't remember what the second one is." ■

Peter Overby has been covering money and politics for 10 years. In 1994, he became the first reporter on National Public Radio's power, money and influence beat.

Uncovering Private Interests in Public Places

Scrutiny of legislators should be part of the statehouse beat.

By Diane Renzulli

While Washington, D.C. slows down during a presidential election year, state lawmakers continue to pass laws dictating everything from the quality of the public's drinking water to the price they pay for utilities to their access to health benefits. During 1999, nearly 38,000 new laws passed in the states, an increase of 42 percent from the year before. In the first two months of 2000 alone, more than 60,000 bills were introduced.

With state legislatures now tackling issues previously dealt with only on Capitol Hill, their clout is at an all-time high. As a result, more national interests clamor for the ear of state policymakers. And the influence game

gets played the same outside the beltway as it does inside, through an influx of campaign cash, sophisticated lobbying, junkets, gifts and business relationships. Throw in weak, unenforced ethics laws at the state level, and "business as usual" in statehouses across the country would often be tagged as illegal in the halls of Congress.

As state budgets remain flush with money and state legislators' power increases, journalists must shine a brighter spotlight on what goes on behind the scenes through an ethics-oriented approach to reporting on state legislatures. In its role as watchdog, the statehouse press needs to watch

more carefully for signs of undue influence by bankrolled groups seeking legislative favors—at the public's expense—and examine how the lawmakers' private concerns influence the laws of the states in which they serve.

During the past few years, several newspapers have followed carefully contributors' money, devoting series of articles to uncovering who is pouring cash into state races and what state lawmakers have done to help their backers.

- Through a four-part "Statehouse Sell-out" series from 1996 to 1998, The Indianapolis Star and News de-

scribed to readers how special interest money flows into the state legislature and how lawmakers are pressured to vote in favor of those interests. By following the money, the reporters discovered that about 20 percent of campaign funds state lawmakers spent had little or nothing to do with getting elected: Most of the money landed in other candidates' campaign accounts, in addition to funds being sent to athletic ticket vendors, car dealerships, and babysitters. They identified lawmakers who sponsored legislation after receiving donations from donors with interests in the legislation.

- In 1998, the San Francisco Examiner's series, "The Money Machine: Big Spenders in California,"

interests sought favors from legislators in power after flooding money into their statehouse campaigns.

With more states making contribution data available electronically, state-based campaign finance reporting, once found primarily in multi-part series, can be incorporated into daily deadline stories. Journalists can now access Web sites that sort and collect valuable state contribution data. For example, Investigative Reporters and Editors' Campaign Finance Information Center collects such data and makes it available to reporters for download, while the National Library on Money in State Politics allows reporters to track contributions to state lawmakers in 28 states. And in states in

which campaign data has not been made available electronically—New York and Virginia, for instance—competing news organizations pooled resources to computerize this data on their own. With faster access to data about financiers of local candidates, more reporters across the country can follow the money flowing into state campaign coffers.

Yet tracking campaign contributions is not the only way to tell readers how outside interests attempt to influence the legislative process in the states. Take state lobbying, for instance. In its recent study of state legislatures, the Center for Public Integrity found that for every state lawmaker in this country, there are at least five registered state lobbyists. But the dollar amount these state lobbyists spend attempting to influence legislators is unknown because several states fail to tally what lobbyists spend.

The good news is that insightful investigative reporting can, from time

to time, make up for the lack of public information on state lobbying.

- In 1998, The Palm Beach Post ran a three-day series examining exactly how lobbyists befriend lawmakers in the Florida General Assembly. To do this series, the paper examined thousands of lobbying reports, collected more than 200 records requests from public entities, and sent a questionnaire to the state's 160 legislators.
- In 1999, The (Baltimore) Sun detailed the story of one Maryland lobbying firm that spent \$400,000 to cozy up to state officials over a three-year period. Sun readers learned exactly how the firm connected with state officials—by handing out \$87,000 worth of event tickets to state officials, contributing thousands to state officials' pet charities, and hiring people with connections to those in power in Annapolis.

Despite the gains in access to contribution data, loopholes in ethics and disclosure laws keep journalists from learning about what goes on behind closed statehouse doors. In nearly every state, special interests can pay for legislators' trips, yet in 17 of these states, lawmakers do not have to divulge who paid for their travel. The Center recently found that, in nearly half the states, lawmakers can hide significant categories of information about their private financial interests from the public and the press because of gaps in existing laws.

With 41 part-time state legislatures in this country, it is equally important for journalists to report the flip side of the "outside interest" story. To do this requires reporters to examine lawmakers' private financial interests and professional activities to assess how those interests might affect state policy. The conflict of interest story is not new to local media, as evidenced by recent stories uncovering state lawmakers abusing their positions of public trust for private gain.

- This past March, The Philadelphia Inquirer examined the ties between

LOUISIANA		CLASS RANK: 46
CATEGORY	GRADE	
AVAILABILITY	3/3	
ACCESS	4/5	
EXTENT	24/90	
PENALTIES	1/2	
TOTAL:	32/100=FAIL	

The Center for Public Integrity's "50 States" project analyzes personal financial disclosure laws in state legislatures. They consider four components of the process, issuing a possible total of 100 points. Then they issue report cards on each state's performance.

detailed how the state's top contributors had given more than \$76 million to legislative races since 1990 and, in doing so, had been able to kill proposed legislation they opposed during that time.

- In 1999, the Sun-Sentinel (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.) and The Orlando Sentinel joined forces for "The Price of Influence," a five-part series exploring how gambling, health care, sugar, telecommunications and tort-reform



Lobbyists crowd around the main entrance to the house chamber's doors in Indiana's statehouse. *Photos on this page courtesy of the Indianapolis Star/Frank Espich.*

the financial interests of Pennsylvania lawmakers and their legislation in a five-day series of investigative articles. They found that 68 of the state's 253 legislators have co-sponsored legislation that could help their own, their employer's, or a close relative's business interests.

The Center for Public Integrity recently completed a two-year investigation of how state lawmakers' jobs, investments and business interests intersect with public duties in all 50 states. In essence, we created a snapshot of state lawmakers' outside interests, and we laid out how these interests commonly become part of lawmakers' legislative agendas. We found thousands of state lawmakers routinely sponsoring and voting on legislation that could boost their private sector incomes. Some lawmakers set up consulting companies to charge fees to clients who need to understand complex legislation they wrote. Others own businesses solely supported by the patronage of lobbyists seeking legislative favors.

Others write laws that would help their law firm clients. Still others head up nonprofit organizations that derive funds from businesses with interests before the committees they chair. And others sponsor legislation benefiting their employer. But because conflict of interest laws are ridden with loopholes, lawmakers are almost always acting within the letter, if not the spirit, of these laws. The current state of lawmaking at statehouses across the nation can mean putting personal interests first—even at the taxpayer's expense.

All of this is happening at a time

when surveys find that fewer reporters are working the statehouse beat. Yet these are precisely the kinds of stories that the public needs to have reported. Without such a spotlight thrown on practices that might be compromising the legislative process, the influence of private interests—including those of legislators themselves—will only become more institutionalized behind closed doors. This shouldn't be happening at a time when technology can assist reporters in retrieving the data that can help them to tell these important stories. By taking a comprehensive, ethics-oriented approach to reporting the statehouse story, this beat can be reinvented, revitalized and once again read widely by a public that needs to be informed. ■

Diane Renzulli is Director of State Projects at the Center for Public Integrity. In 1996 and 1997, she worked with local media through the Center's Power and Money in Indiana and Illinois projects.



If the conscientious practice of journalism is essential to democracy, as the First Amendment attests, then what, if any, contemporary forces are undermining the critical role journalists have historically played? In this section, this question is addressed from a variety of perspectives.

Jessica Dorman, American Studies professor and former journalist, wonders where all the muckrakers have gone now that such reporting is needed again. Columnist **Norman Solomon** worries about what he doesn't find in coverage about media mergers: discussion of the implications about what these mergers might mean in terms of limiting democratic discourse. Former Washington Post reporter **Morton Mintz** surveys what has already happened to the editorial voice when the subject is corporate immorality. He finds it has been silenced. **Jeffrey Scheuer**, author of "The Sound Bite Society: Television and the American Mind," urges journalists to resist the commercial impulse in favor of their public function: to promote and inform our essential democratic debate.

In his review of Robert W. McChesney's book, "Rich Media, Poor Democracy," **James W. Carey**, professor at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, argues that "journalism and democracy are names for the same thing." **Lorie Hearn**, Metro Editor of The San Diego Union-Tribune, assesses media lawyer and author Bruce Sanford's belief that the press needs to regain the public's confidence for constitutional rights not to be eroded. **Jim Tharpe**, Deputy Metro Editor of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, finds Bartholomew Sparrow, author of "Uncertain Guardians: The News Media as a Political Institution," arguing that journalism's watchdogs are being silenced by greed. And **Cara DeVito**, reviewing Michael Janeway's "Republic of Denial," widens the outlook by placing what's happening with journalism in the context of the broader "culture of suspicion."

Using as her foundation Jay Rosen's provocative question and book "What Are Journalists For?," **Ellen Hume**, former Executive Director of PBS's Democracy Project, explores the fractious debate about civic journalism and comes down on the side of believing that important connections exist between journalism and citizenship. Finally, **Roy Gutman** assumes a global perspective in his look at a new book written by William Shawcross, "Deliver Us From Evil," and points to the pitfalls of "insider" journalism when compared with investigative legwork. ■

Where Are Muckraking Journalists Today?

An historian says the usual excuses for their absence aren't valid.

By Jessica Dorman

Americans haven't always hated journalists. Nor have American Presidents.

At the turn of the last century, no magazines were more popular than the general interest monthlies—McClure's, Everybody's, Success—magazines that mixed fiction and verse with investigative journalism.

And no public figure was more esteemed than Ray Stannard Baker, crusading reporter for McClure's. Readers—hundreds of thousands of them—waited eagerly each month for the latest Baker exposé. And President Theodore Roosevelt waited, equally eagerly, for consultations with this man whom he considered both friend and adviser.

Nothing pleased the President more than the opportunity to preview Baker's articles—"and that not because of any good I can do you, but because I have learned to look to your articles for real help," Roosevelt gushed. "You have impressed me with your earnest desire to be fair, with your freedom from hysteria, and with your anxiety to tell the truth rather than to write something that will be sensational."

Roosevelt granted Baker access to restricted government files and entertained his pet journalist at intimate Oyster Bay retreats. On display, or so it seemed, was the happy marriage of press and politics. Roosevelt and Baker—indeed, Roosevelt and the en-

tire McClure's gang—saw themselves as partners in progressive reform. Only when Roosevelt turned on the reform press in April of 1906, branding them "muckrakers" in a much-publicized speech, did the instability of the partnership come clear.

"Even admitting that some of the so-

called 'exposures' have been extreme, have they not, as a whole, been honest and useful?" Baker asked, on the eve of the President's attack. "Would not a speech, backed by all of your great authority, attacking the magazines, tend to give aid and comfort to these very rascals, besides making it more difficult in the future not only to get the truth told but to have it listened to?" Baker trusted that intimacy guaranteed fidelity.

Forwarding proofs of his next McClure's essay, he begged Roosevelt to "help me with it by telling me frankly whether you think I have overstepped the bounds of decent journalism."

But TR wasn't in the mood to listen anymore. William Randolph Hearst's *Cosmopolitan* magazine was skewering presidential pals in its series on "The Treason of the Senate;" socialists like Upton Sinclair were invading the investigative ranks and "decent journalism," in Roosevelt's reckoning, was no longer useful.

In its heyday, between 1903 and 1906, muckraking journalism was ubiquitous, urgent, influential. The "interests" (what we call today "special interests") threatened the commonweal; the press attacked the interests. Even in the wake of TR's tongue-lashing, investigative journalism continued to power Progressive reforms. Where have all the muckrakers gone?



Ray Stannard Baker, crusading reporter for McClure's. *Photo courtesy of the Ray Stannard Baker Papers, Jones Library, Inc., Amherst, Massachusetts.*

Where Have All the Muckrakers Gone?

Sure, there are writers doing impassioned investigative work today. But why do systemic defects receive so little sustained attention from the mainstream press?

The magic of Progressive era muckraking was its centrality. Muckrakers such as Lincoln Steffens and Ida Tarbell wrote for mass-market magazines. They turned local issues into national issues, local protests into national crusades. They didn't preach to the converted; they did the converting, helping transform America from a laissez-faire to a welfare state mentality.

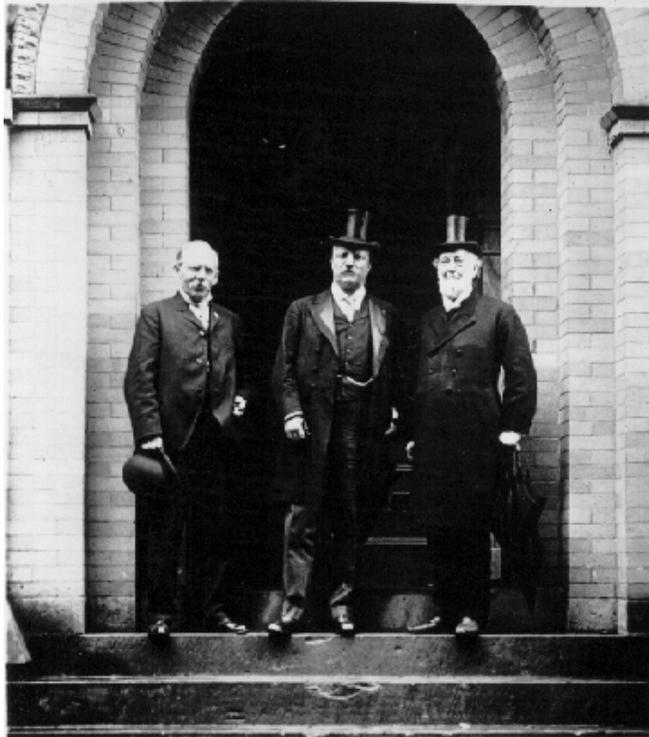
To explain the relative passivity of today's popular press, critics venture two verdicts: social cooperation and economic cooperation. Investigative reporting, they argue, has been rendered obsolete by inside-the-beltway schmoozing and media conglomerates.

But Are These Really New Phenomena?

As the Baker-Roosevelt relationship demonstrates, intimacy with "sources" was no taboo for the reform journalists of the Progressive era. Nor were the original muckrakers scrappy independents: Many worked for media moguls like Hearst, Pulitzer, Lorimer, or Curtis. Railroad, traction, sugar and steel companies owned stock in publishing enterprises. "Back of the magazines and newspapers are the classes and special interests of society," fretted one critic in 1910. "[The magazines] do not need to be told what their editorial policy must be if they expect to enjoy the favor and patronage of the trusts and other money interests," warned another in 1912.

The muckrakers, meanwhile, defended their right to exert influence ("to become part of the event," in Baker's words), but they remained cu-

riously unconcerned that they themselves might be "influenced" by others. In the spring of 1906, several McClure's reporters purchased their own journal, *The American Magazine*. Editor John Siddall sent Ida Tarbell to Boston to "hustle for money." "I suggested that she might tackle Douglas, Whitney and that whole Massachusetts tariff bunch. Just put it right up to them that she is going to work in our new maga-



Jacob Riis (left), who photographed impoverished social conditions, President Theodore Roosevelt, and Bishop John H. Vincent (right). *Photo courtesy of the Theodore Roosevelt Collection, Harvard College Library.*

zine on the tariff. They have got to help," Siddall said. By 1911, the Crowell Company, a publishing conglomerate that featured one of J.P. Morgan's side-kicks, Thomas Lamont, on its board of directors, had absorbed the *American*. By 1912 the *American* was jumping text to the back pages "in the hope of catching the reader who might otherwise ignore" advertising matter.

Progressive era muckraking was hardly a crusade of virtuous outsiders against entrenched and corrupt interests. But it was, nonetheless, a powerful force for reform. So, again: Where have all the muckrakers gone?

Explaining the Absence of Muckrakers

Three hypotheses may help explain the demise of muckraking.

- **Pacing.** Most of the investigative work immortalized as muckraking first surfaced in monthly magazines. Groundbreaking exposés like Tarbell's "History of the Standard Oil Company" and Baker's "Following the Color Line" were rationed out, month by month, like serial fiction. Who, today, is willing to wait a month for breaking news? We want our news now. And so do publishers and producers. As a result, the copy we get lacks the gravitas—not to mention the literary flair—of the best muckraking. S.S. McClure gave his reporters months, even years, to research stories. When Steffens chafed at office duties, McClure told him to "[g]et out of here, travel, go—some-where.... Buy a railroad ticket, get on a train, and there, where it lands you, there you will learn to edit a magazine." Steffens hopped the Lackawanna (McClure's had plenty of free passes, thanks to advertising swaps) and spent two years exposing "The Shame of the Cities." Since then, the pace of news production, and consumption, has sped up considerably.

- **Power.** "Here is the thing you must bear in mind," Roosevelt explained to Baker. "I do not represent public opinion: I represent the public. There is a wide difference between the two, between the real interests of the public, and the public's opinion of those interests. I must represent not the excited opinion of the most but the real interests of the whole people." The press, TR argued, may lead public opinion, and lead it astray, but only elected representatives may properly lead the people. To this day, it is the rare journalist who dares play at leader-

ship. Editorial charisma is equated with subjectivity at best, sensationalism at worst. And no “responsible” journalist wants to slip into the sensationalist camp. The press remains its own best censor. What is public journalism, for instance, if not a self-imposed stifling mechanism: an effort to avoid the assertion of journalistic personality, the expression of journalistic expertise?

- **Characterization.** Progressive era muckraking was story-oriented, narrative-based. Exposés had their heroes and—more vital—their villains. Bullying businessmen, spineless senators, corrupt judges: Bad guys doing bad things made the stories tick. Muckraking journalism explained systemic problems in human-interest terms. Writers showed readers who, exactly, was screwing whom. The more powerful the vil-

lain, the more powerful the exposé. In Ida Tarbell’s telling, John D. Rockefeller was “no ordinary man”: he had “the powerful imagination to see what might be done with the oil business if it could be centered in his hands, the intelligence to analyze the problem into its elements, and to find the key to control.” The fact that there was “no more faithful Baptist in Cleveland than he” made Rockefeller all the more intimidating—and compelling—an adversary.

Who are today’s villains? Super-geeks in Silicon Valley? Computer hackers? Luddites? And even if we could identify the villains, are journalists willing to go after them? Compared with journalists a century ago, the answer would seem to be no.

At the turn of this century, stories about indiscretions of public figures roused Americans to anger because

journalists framed personal narratives in relentlessly public terms. Were government inspectors safeguarding the nation’s meat supply? Were police fighting or feeding municipal corruption? Were railroad officials placing profits above public safety?

Americans like to direct their righteous indignation at people, not systems. The moment Bill Gates emerges, in print, as Rockefeller’s equal in knavery, a man whose corporate interests work against the grain of the public good, the nation’s story hour will have resumed. ■

Jessica Dorman, a former president of The Harvard Crimson, is an assistant professor of American Studies at Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg.

Coverage of Media Mergers

Does it provide a window into the future of journalism?

By Norman Solomon

Four months after the stunning news about plans to combine Viacom and CBS, this year began with the announcement of an even more spectacular merger—America Online and Time Warner. Faced with these giant steps toward extreme concentration of media power, journalists mostly responded with acquiescence.

Now, as one huge media merger follows another, the benefits for owners and investors are evident. But for our society as a whole, the consequences seem ominous. The same limits that have constrained the media’s coverage of recent mergers within its own ranks are becoming features of this new mass media landscape. For the public, nothing less than democratic discourse hangs in the balance.

“Freedom of the press is guaranteed

only to those who own one,” A.J. Liebling remarked several decades ago. In 2000, half a dozen corporations own media outlets that control most of the news and information flow in the United States. The accelerating mergers are terrific for the profits of those with the deepest pockets, but bad for journalism and bad for democracy.

When the Viacom-CBS story broke, media coverage depicted a match made in corporate heaven: At more than \$37 billion, it was the largest media merger in history. With potential effects on the broader public kept outside the story’s frame, what emerged was a rosy picture. “Analysts hailed the deal as a good fit between two complementary companies,” The Associated Press reported flatly. The news service went on to quote a media analyst who proclaimed:

“It’s a good deal for everybody.”

“Everybody”? Well, everybody who counts in the mass media calculus. For instance, the media analyst quoted by AP was from the PaineWebber investment firm. “You need to be big,” Christopher Dixon explained. “You need to have a global presence.” Dixon showed up again the next morning in the lead article of the September 8 edition of The New York Times, along with other high-finance strategists. An analyst at Merrill Lynch agreed with his upbeat view of the Viacom-CBS combination. So did an expert from ING Barings: “You can literally pick an advertiser’s needs and market that advertiser across all the demographic profiles, from Nickelodeon with the youngest consumers to CBS with some of the oldest consumers.”

In sync with the prevalent media spin, The New York Times devoted plenty of ink to assessing advertiser needs and demographic profiles. But during the crucial first day of the Times's coverage, foes of the Viacom-CBS consolidation did not get a word in edgewise. There was, however, an unintended satire of corporate journalism when a writer referred to the bygone era of the 1970's: "In those quaint days, it bothered people when companies owned too many media properties."

The Washington Post, meanwhile, ran a front-page story that provided similar treatment of the latest and greatest media merger, pausing just long enough for a short dissonant note from media critic Mark Crispin Miller: "The implications of these mergers for journalism and the arts are enormous. It seems to me that this is, by any definition, an undemocratic development. The media system in a democracy should not be inordinately dominated by a few very powerful interests." It wasn't an idea that the Post's journalists pursued.

Overall, the big media outlets—getting bigger all the time—offer narrow and cheery perspectives on the significance of merger mania. News accounts keep the focus on market share preoccupations of investors and top managers. Numerous stories explore the widening vistas of cross-promotional synergy for the shrewdest media titans. While countless reporters are determined to probe how each company stands to gain from the latest deal, few of them demonstrate much enthusiasm for exploring what is at stake for the public.

With rare exceptions, news outlets

covered the Viacom-CBS merger as a business story. But more than anything else, it should have been covered, at least in part, as a story with dire implications for possibilities of democratic discourse. And the same was true for the announcement that came a few months later—on January 10, 2000—when a hush seemed to fall over the profession of journalism.

A grand new structure, AOL Time Warner, was unveiled in the midst of much talk about a wondrous New Media world to come, with cornucopias of bandwidth and market share. On January 2, just one week before the portentous announcement, the head of Time Warner had alluded to the transcendent horizons. Global media "will be and is fast becoming the predominant business of the 21st century," Gerald Levin said on CNN, "and we're in a new economic age, and what may happen, assuming that's true, is it's more im-

portant than government. It's more important than educational institutions and nonprofits." have the reach, they have the skill base. And maybe there's a new generation coming up that wants to achieve meaning in that context and have an impact, and that may be a more efficient way to deal with society's problems than bureaucratic governments." Levin's next sentence underscored the sovereign right of capital in dictating the new direction. "It's going to be forced anyhow because when you have a system that is instantly available everywhere in the world immediately, then the old-fashioned regulatory system has to give way," he said.

To discuss an imposed progression of events as some kind of natural occurrence is a convenient form of mysticism, long popular among the corporately pious, who are often eager to wear mantles of royalty and divinity. Tacit beliefs deem the accumulation of wealth to be redemptive. Inside corporate temples, monetary standards gauge



Cartoon by Signe Wilkinson. © 2000, The Washington Post Writers Group. Reprinted with permission.

portant than government. It's more important than educational institutions and nonprofits."

Levin went on. "So what's going to be necessary is that we're going to need to have these corporations redefined as instruments of public service because they have the resources, they

worth. Powerful executives now herald joy to the world via a seamless web of media. Along the way, the rest of us are not supposed to worry much about democracy. On January 12, AOL chief Steve Case assured a national PBS television audience on "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer": "Nobody's going to

control anything.” Seated next to him, Levin declared: “This company is going to operate in the public interest.”

Such pledges, invariably uttered in benevolent tones, were bursts of fog while Case and Levin moved ahead to gain more billions for themselves and maximum profits for some other incredibly wealthy people. By happy coincidence, they insisted, the media course that would make them richest was the same one that held the most fulfilling promise for everyone on the planet.

Journalists accustomed to scrutinizing the public statements of powerful officials seem quite willing to hang back from challenging the claims of media magnates. Even when reporting on a rival media firm, journalists who work in glass offices hesitate to throw weighty stones; a substantive critique of corporate media priorities could easily boomerang. And when a media merger suddenly occurs, news coverage can turn deferential overnight.

On March 14—the day after the Tribune Company announced its purchase of the Los Angeles Times and the rest of the Times Mirror empire—the acquired newspaper reported on the fine attributes of its owner-to-be. In a news article that read much like a corporate press release, the Times hailed the Tribune Company as “a diversified media concern with a reputation for strong management” and touted its efficient benevolence. Tribune top managers, in the same article, “get good marks for using cost-cutting and technology improvements throughout the corporation to generate a profit margin that’s among the industry’s highest.” The story went on to say that “Tribune is known for not using massive job cuts to generate quick profits from media properties it has bought.”

Compare that rosy narrative to another news article published the same day, by The New York Times. Its story asserted, as a matter of fact, that “The Tribune Co. has a reputation not only for being a fierce cost-cutter and union buster but for putting greater and greater emphasis on entertainment and business.”

“It is not necessary to construct a

theory of intentional cultural control,” media critic Herbert Schiller commented in 1989. “In truth, the strength of the control process rests in its apparent absence. The desired systemic result is achieved ordinarily by a loose though effective institutional process.” In his book “Culture, Inc.,” subtitled “The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression,” Schiller went on to cite “the education of journalists and other media professionals, built-in penalties and rewards for doing what is expected, norms presented as objective rules, and the occasional but telling direct intrusion from above. The main lever is the internalization of values.”

Self-censorship has long been one of journalism’s most ineffable hazards. The current wave of mergers rocking the media industry is likely to heighten the dangers. To an unprecedented extent, large numbers of American reporters and editors now work for just a few huge corporate employers, a situation that hardly encourages unconstrained scrutiny of media conglomerates as they assume unparalleled importance in public life.

The mergers also put a lot more journalists on the payrolls of megamedia institutions that are very newsworthy as major economic and social forces. But if those institutions are paying the professionals who provide the bulk of the country’s news coverage, how much will the public learn about the internal dynamics and societal effects of these global entities?

Many of us grew up with tales of journalistic courage dating back to Colonial days. John Peter Zenger’s ability to challenge the British Crown with unyielding articles drew strength from the fact that he was a printer and publisher. Writing in *The New York Weekly*, a periodical burned several times by the public hangman, Zenger asserted in November 1733: “The loss of liberty in general would soon follow the suppression of the liberty of the press; for it is an essential branch of liberty, so perhaps it is the best preservative of the whole.”

In contrast to state censorship, which is usually easy to recognize, self-censorship by journalists tends to be ob-

scured. It is particularly murky and insidious in the emerging media environment, with routine pressures to defer to employers that have massive industry clout and global reach. We might wonder how Zenger would fare in most of today’s media workplaces, especially if he chose to denounce as excessive the power of the conglomerate providing his paycheck.

Americans are inclined to quickly spot and automatically distrust government efforts to impose prior restraint. But what about the implicit constraints imposed by the hierarchies of enormous media corporations and internalized by employees before overt conflicts develop?

“If liberty means anything at all,” George Orwell wrote, “it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.” As immense communications firms increasingly dominate our society, how practical will it be for journalists to tell their bosses—and the public—what media tycoons do not want to hear about the concentration of power in few corporate hands? Orwell’s novel “1984” describes the conditioned reflex of “stopping short, as though by instinct, at the threshold of any dangerous thought...and of being bored or repelled by any train of thought which is capable of leading in a heretical direction.”

In the real world of 2000, bypassing key issues of corporate dominance is apt to be a form of obedience: in effect, self-censorship. “Circus dogs jump when the trainer cracks his whip,” Orwell observed more than half a century ago, “but the really well-trained dog is the one that turns his somersault when there is no whip.” Of course, no whips are visible in America’s modern newsrooms and broadcast studios. But if Orwell were alive today, he would surely urge us to be skeptical about all the somersaults. ■

Norman Solomon’s weekly column on media and politics is distributed to newspapers by Creators Syndicate. His latest book is “The Habits of Highly Deceptive Media: Decoding Spin and Lies in Mainstream News.”

The Sound You Hear Is Silence

When the subject is corporate immorality, nary a judgmental word is heard.

“How often have you seen or heard of a newspaper editorial or column or...talking head criticizing grave corporate crime or misconduct, and, particularly, the executives personally responsible for such crime or misconduct?”

“I can’t remember the most recent occasion.”

An exchange between the writer and Assistant Attorney General James K. Robinson, Chief of the Criminal Division, U.S. Department of Justice, February 17, 1999.

By Morton Mintz

Of course James Robinson was stumped: He couldn’t recall media criticism of corporate immorality because so little of it occurs—none, in fact, in many major newspapers. Year after year after year, leading mainstream opinion-shapers shun the subject. Moreover, they generally prefer not to admit the shunning. It’s freedom of the press.

These conclusions arise from a survey early last year of columnists and editorial writers that was created to determine the extent of commentary in the print and electronic press on “immoral corporate behavior.” Included in this category were incidents involving corporate crime as well as corporate conduct that “significantly harms the environment and human life, safety or health, or defrauds federal, state or local governments or large groups of individuals.” [See accompanying box for survey design and distribution.]

In all, 124 editorial writers, columnists and commentators were queried about what they had said about egregious corporate behavior during the 10 years ending December 1998. Examples of news reports about companies’ misconduct were included with the query. [See box on next page for list of examples.] From the responses I received, it’s fair to say that it’s a rare day in 3,650 days when the national media expose Americans to opinions on corporate wrongdoing.

Generalizations, however, can be

misleading. For example, while it’s extremely unusual for The New York Times to comment on corporate morality, it did so in “Corporations and Conscience,” an editorial published in December 1998. The Times, building on a Washington Post exposé of Gen-

eral Motors’ and Ford’s dealings in Nazi Germany, declared certain repressive foreign regimes “so heinous that simply to continue making profits under them is reprehensible.”

When such criticism does occur, it’s more often on editorial pages far from New York and Washington. In 1998, for example, The (Louisville) Courier-Journal, led by Editorial Director David Hawpe, blasted a mainstay of Kentucky’s economy. That paper’s 14-editorial series began:

“COAL is an outlaw industry. It is now, and it always has been.

“COAL is the closest thing to brute, unrepentant, late 19th century capitalism that we have left in American life.”

Designing and Distributing the Survey

With the help of researcher Sue Schuermann, electronic databases were examined to find news stories about corporate crimes and misconduct. These examples were individualized for inclusion in the letters that queried 124 opinion-shapers. The examples, drawn mostly from news reports in The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times, filled five single-spaced pages. [See box on next page for examples.]

Recipients of these letters included 30 nationally prominent columnists and television and radio talk show commentators, editorial page editors at the six nationally distributed newspapers, and their counterparts at 88 additional leading papers in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

The letters asked these individuals to let me know whether they had addressed: “1) Corporate crime and misconduct generally” [using the definition in this story], and “2) Specific examples of corporate crime

and misconduct.” I wanted their focus to be on recent coverage (during 1998), but also requested that they look back over the past decade as well to come up with examples of such commentary.

Later, I lightened the burden to encourage additional replies, inviting each reluctant respondent to tell me “[S]imply...whether you remember having addressed” the questions in the letter. This helped to some extent, but most of those who hadn’t replied remained mute. My presumption is that many took the easy way out. Is it unreasonable to think that it could be tough for them to deny that their own positions within big corporations sometimes made it difficult to criticize the actions of other big businesses? Or for them to reveal that their owners sometimes imposed their will? Or that careerists, opportunists and survivors sometimes self censor? ■

Here is a summary of survey responses and related findings:

William F. Buckley, Jr., was one of four nationally syndicated columnists who addressed the “why” of my inquiry regarding the relative silence on the topic of corporate immorality. He did so not in correspondence but publicly—in a piece skewering *The Nation*, which originally had commissioned me to do the survey—with the acerbity one might expect: “Are conservatives...ethically callous about business delinquencies? It is true that they don’t feature heavily in conservative commentary. But there is a humdrumness to business malpractice that simply makes it all less eye-catching than misbehavior by individuals....” He concluded: *The Nation*, “doggedly leftist,” “wishes to hurt business,” in contrast to his *National Review* which “wishes business to prosper.” (His column ran in February 1999, shortly before the survey was completed and weeks before I’d written my report. In the end, *The Nation* decided not to publish it.)

Cal Thomas, a former Vice President of the Moral Majority, also had a query to offer. “Have my liberal colleagues written about some of the things about which I’ve written or, more specifically, taken my position on them? Probably not.” In 1997, Thomas advocated closing all public schools. He pronounced children to be “raw material,” and declared the time had come to “withdraw this material” from public education.

A.M. Rosenthal, then of *The New York Times*, made his point with quotes from columns he had written for nearly 12 years. Almost from his start as a columnist, he said, “I wrote consistently about the economic benefits to dictatorships...that come from American companies, the fact that American import-export trade profits the people who run the political and religious jails, not their victims, that the cash register has become the dominant factor in American trade, not American principle....”

John Leo wrote back to remind me, “[M]y column deals primarily with social trends.”

Three Washington heavy hitters (and non-responders to this survey), all published and syndicated by *The Washington Post*, have made remarkable pronouncements relating to corporate immorality:

George F. Will endorses “punishing by shaming,” a practice in which the names of “drug users, drunken drivers or men who solicit prostitutes or are delinquent in child support” are published or broadcast. Corporate wrongdoers? They didn’t make Will’s cut.

Robert J. Samuelson: “Big business

has been brought to heel politically.” Campaign financing? Not to worry: It amounted, in 1996, to only “one-twentieth of one percent of the gross domestic product.”

Charles Krauthammer: Only “Luddites” protest genetically engineered bovine growth hormone (BGH) in their milk, such milk being “perfectly normal.” (In March 1999, a European Union scientific panel recommended more study into whether milk from BGH-treated cows increases the risk of cancer in humans.)

News Stories about Corporate Crime and Misconduct

The query to editorial page editors and commentators cited more than 20 specific examples of grave corporate crime and misconduct.

A sampling follows:

- The Ortho unit of Johnson & Johnson* pleaded guilty to conspiring to obstruct and obstructing justice and was fined \$7.5 million. The FDA had approved Ortho’s Retin-A for acne; Ortho violated FDA regulations by promoting it for a vastly larger market—wrinkle removal.
 - Royal Caribbean Cruises* pleaded guilty to a fleet-wide conspiracy to dump oily wastewater illegally. RCC’s \$9 million fine was the largest ever levied for such a crime. A month later, RCC’s Nordic Empress illegally dumped again. In March, RCC again pleaded guilty to a three-count indictment charging concealment of illegal discharges from the Nordic Prince into the Pacific.
 - Three former C.R. Bard executives were convicted of concealing faults in unapproved catheters used in some 22,000 heart surgery patients. One died, one had a heart attack, 22 needed emergency surgery.
 - May Department Stores settled
- claims of illegally collecting debt from bankrupt consumers by agreeing to pay them \$15 million and 27 states \$7 million. Earlier, Sears Roebuck and the GE Capital unit of General Electric* resolved similar claims.
 - A Florida jury ordered General Motors* to pay \$33 million to the parents of a boy who was incinerated in a 1983 Oldsmobile that burst into flames on being hit in the rear.
 - DuPont agreed to pay nearly \$11.3 million to settle charges of withholding critical evidence in one of some 500 lawsuits brought by growers who blamed DuPont’s Benlate DF fungicide for hundreds of millions of dollars in damages.
 - A federal lawsuit charged Columbia/HCA Healthcare Corp. and Quorum Health Group with defrauding health programs for more than 14 years.
 - Florida’s attorney general and insurance commissioner concluded in a joint report that Prudential Insurance cheated policyholders for 13 years in “a deceptive scheme ... embraced by the very top management.” ■

* It and/or its subsidiaries have been convicted of a crime at least twice.

By contrast, the relatively obscure William Pfaff, writing from Paris, insightfully explored “the injuries contemporary corporate business values have inflicted.”

The only editorial page editor of a “national” paper who replied was Janet Clayton, of the Los Angeles Times. She let me know that “On our op-ed page we regularly run Alex Cockburn [the Nation columnist]. I’m sure you know he delights in savaging...‘corporate crime and misconduct.’”

Meanwhile, among the non-responders—a large majority of those queried—was The Wall Street Journal, whose publisher, Peter R. Kann, annually lauds his editorial page in an op-ed report to readers. In 1997 he boasted that the page “does not shrink from discussing morality.” Indeed, for seven years now, a torrent of Journal editorials has denounced the morality of the President. However, during the 28 years Robert L. Bartley has edited the opinion page, no editorial could be found that impugned the morality of the many persons responsible for the corporate crimes reported by the Journal’s own reporting staff.

Journal news columns surround the editorial page with so much information on corporate crime that Ralph Nader suggests renaming it “The Crime Street Journal.” The Nation’s Robert Sherrill tested and verified the Nader assertion by monitoring Journal coverage throughout 1996. Among the examples from Sherrill’s research that appeared in the story, “A Year in Corporate Crime,” in 1997, were these:

- Lucas Industries pleaded guilty to falsifying quality records for F-18 fighter gearboxes, hiding defects the Navy blamed “for 71 emergency landings and several in-flight fires, as well as the loss of an F-18 during the Gulf War.” Lucas was fined \$106 million.
- Archer Daniels Midland pleaded guilty to conspiring to fix prices for a livestock feed supplement and citric acid. ADM was fined \$100 million.

The Washington Post has repeatedly

excoriated cigarette industry conduct, but I could find no editorial addressing other grave corporate immorality.

Eight editorial page editors responded, primarily from newspapers that focus their attention, for the most part, on local- and state-based corporate conduct.

Cynthia Tucker, Editorial Page Editor at the Atlanta Constitution, provided notable examples related to my query. In one case, the paper chastised DuPont management for suppressing adverse evidence at a Georgia trial centered on a crop-destroying fungicide. In another instance, federal fraud charges against Columbia/HCA Healthcare Corporation were commented upon, as they were also by the Providence Journal editorial page, edited by Robert Whitcomb. The Constitution also repeatedly attacked LCP Chemicals for dumping “staggering” amounts of mercury into a creek near Brunswick, Georgia. If 140 short-term jobs had to be lost to prevent frightful “permanent health risks to the many,” so be it, the editorial declared. In the end, LCP shuttered the plant and pleaded guilty to what a federal judge termed “the most arrogant and egregious violation of the environmental protection laws in this country.” Three LCP executives were convicted of “purposefully” releasing hazardous materials and “knowingly endangering the health of LCP workers.”

Frank Michel at the Houston Chronicle noted that the paper had published recent editorials, columns and op-ed pieces criticizing several major companies. Conoco was targeted for doing “business with rogue Middle Eastern states.” Champion International’s “apparent double standard for safety precautions as they apply to Hispanic workers vs. Anglo workers” was the topic of an editorial, as were the “many flags-of-convenience merchant ship operators...that ignore health and safety of seamen,” and Houston Power & Light’s “disturbing mismanagement of a nuclear power plant.”

The Seattle Post-Intelligencer’s Joann Byrd counted at least half a dozen editorials each year that “come down on every corporation that we learn has

harmed the environment, imperiled human life or health or defrauded the taxpayers, and/or consumers, and/or ratepayers, and/or our grandchildren....” The Boston Globe’s H.D.S. Greenway pointed to the paper’s “tough” treatment of General Electric because of its “brownfields” in the western part of Massachusetts, and he recounted the role the paper played when “we turned back an attempt to build an environment-threatening dump out in Northfield, a small town on the Connecticut River.”

Other newspapers, such as the St. Paul Pioneer Press and Asbury Park (N.J.) Press, assured us that corporate misconduct was an occasional topic on their editorial pages. Bill Hall, Editorial Page Editor of the Lewiston (Idaho) Morning Tribune, left little doubt as to his inclination when he sniffs corporate wrongdoing in his neighborhood. “Helped only by a sidekick,” Hall wrote, he has been “pasting the SOB’s” for 34 years. “[W]e write 14 editorials and five columns a week, many [on] corporate greed—especially as it involves pollution, car safety, and consumer fraud. I don’t know how many hundred we have done,” he said.

No such toughness was claimed in three large Midwest cities where editorial page editors admitted to not being stirred by corporate misconduct: “We generally focus...on the policy implications of events and trends...” wrote Thomas J. Bray, of The Detroit News. Richard Hood, at The Kansas City Star, hasn’t “editorialized on the subject” since taking charge in 1972. And Russell Pulliam, at The Indianapolis Star, told us he “can’t recall any [editorials] that specifically address corporate immorality.”

Occasionally, guest critiques involving corporate behavior appear in other newspapers distant from New York and Washington. For example, in 1997 in the Chicago Tribune, John E. Swanson, a former member of Dow Corning’s Business Ethics Committee, wrote an op-ed about the silicon breast implant debacle: The company, he said, “has only itself to blame” and its bankruptcy “is no absolution for ultimate moral or financial liability.” About a decade ago,

a public interest group leader writing in *The San Diego Union-Tribune* protested the presence of “CEO’s, presidents and directors for environmentally irresponsible corporations...on the boards of many national environmental groups.” And in the mid-1990’s, a critic of the legal fiction of the corporation as a “person”—a person liable to punishment of capital, not capital punishment—wrote in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* that the corporation is incapable of “‘personal responsibility’ or patriotism either.”

Big Trucks, Bad Pollution and Commentators’ Silence

The trigger for doing the survey was a stunning episode of sustained corporate immorality. Its toll on people and the environment was enormous, and its visible impact on media opinion-molders zero.

During the last decade, some 1.3 million large trucks poisoned the air everyone breathes with illegal emissions of millions of tons of nitrogen oxide. NOx helps to form pollutants — smog (ozone), soot and dust—that can cause premature death and numerous ills, including asthma attacks and bronchitis. The elderly and children are particularly at risk. NOx also helps to cause acid rain. During 1998 alone, the trucks released 1.3 million *extra* tons of NOx, a ton each, on average, and almost 10 pounds for every man, woman and child in America. It would have taken an additional 65 million automobiles to produce as much.

In October 1998 the Environmental Protection Agency and the Justice Department jointly released these facts, and many more, about how the seven largest manufacturers of heavy-duty diesel engines had illegally increased noxious emissions in order to increase fuel efficiency five to eight percent.

This was a classic trade of private gain for public pain. The tradeoff was made possible by a computerized “defeat” device governing emission controls. In stop-and-go driving it turned on the emission controls, limiting release of NOx emissions in testing stations where such driving was simulated. But in highway driving, the device automatically disabled the controls, saving fuel while at the same time as much as tripling legally permitted outputs of NOx. Carol M. Browner, the EPA administrator, referred to them as “‘deceit’ devices.”

Beginning in 1989, Caterpillar and

lowed, then Cummins Engine, and, finally, Navistar and Volvo Truck.

Once the deceit was uncovered and the companies faced litigation, the manufacturers consented to a settlement. Browner hailed it as “the largest action ever taken under the Clean Air Act.” The companies agreed to pay \$83.4 million in penalties, \$41 million to reimburse government expenses, and to spend \$1 billion for environmental improvements, mostly building cleaner engines. They would reduce pollution in their existing engines and recall large pickup trucks equipped with the device. By 2003, the government said, it expects the settlement will cut diesel NOx emissions by one-third, and by 2025 will have prevented 75 million tons of NOx pollution.

Even though major news outlets regularly ignore or slight news of corporate crime and misconduct, the settlement of the EPA charges made

page one in *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*. *The Los Angeles Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *CBS News* all carried solid accounts. Thus editorial writers, columnists and talking heads were staring at an obvious and rich lode of content. Yet not one editorial or commentary that mined this news could be found.

Major environmental groups afforded media commentators additional golden—and

missed—opportunities to scrutinize the diligence of the EPA. By permitting the engines to operate until rebuilt hundreds of thousands of miles later, the watchdog groups protested, the agency evaded the Clean Air Act’s requirement



Truck traffic in Laredo, Texas. *Aerial photography by J. Michael Short.*

Detroit Diesel had become the first of the seven manufacturers of heavy-duty diesel engines to offer this device. Inevitably, competitors felt pressure to fall in line. Mack Trucks and its partner, Renault Vehicules Industriels, s.a., fol-

for a recall, thereby imperiling the nation's health. Later, in a still-pending federal class action lawsuit, truckers sued the manufacturers for \$1 billion. They alleged "a level of wholesale corporate fraud almost beyond imagination," in the words of Albert H. Meyerhoff, a long-time public interest lawyer, before he joined the law firm representing the truckers.

The lawsuit cast an even harsher light on the EPA. In 1991, John Deere Company informed the agency that the devices were being used, and Cummins and Caterpillar complained subsequently that the devices were "illegal." The EPA didn't respond. In 1993, John Deere complained formally that the technology was illegal. This time, the agency indicated "that it would look into the matter." In 1996, an independent investigation, commissioned by

Bershad Hynes & Lerach, searched databases for news reports and commentary. It found neither. While the press was ignoring the revelation of EPA nonfeasance, Congress was not. An "extensive investigation," a House Commerce Committee staff report said in late March, "revealed a pattern of gross negligence and striking indifference by EPA throughout the early and mid-1990's to the very real possibility—now a known certainty—that diesel truck engines were emitting pollutants far in excess of regulatory standards." Despite "repeated warnings," EPA "failed to take any serious action to even investigate [for] more than six years...."

James Robinson took over the Criminal Division at the U.S. Justice Department in June 1998, four months before his boss, Attorney General Janet Reno,

"I wasn't involved and don't know the answer," Robinson replied.

Ignoring Modern Day Villains

Nearly a century ago, in 1907, sociologist Edward Alsworth Ross distinguished "the old authentic sins" from "impersonal" sins. He described these new sins as the "multitude of new forms of wrongdoing" in an industrial society that put us "at each other's mercy."

In his book, "Sin and Society: An Analysis of Latter-Day Iniquity," Ross wrote that "the villain most in need of curbing is the respectable, exemplary trusted personage...able from his office chair to pick a thousand pockets, poison a thousand sick, pollute a thousand lives.... It is the great-scale, high-voltage sinner that needs the shackle."

Ross faulted a public that "beholds sin in a false perspective, seeing peccadilloes as crimes, and crimes as peccadilloes." Today, most Americans doubtless see peccadilloes as peccadilloes but too few yet see corporate crimes as "crimes" and corporate immorality as "immorality." Thus the public continues to behold sin in a false perspective. It's as if workplace and occupational disease deaths don't outpace murders (56,000 vs. 19,000 in 1998), or the annual cost of corporate and white-collar fraud doesn't dwarf the cost of burglaries and robberies (hundreds of billions vs. \$3.8 billion in 1998), or illegal NOx doesn't pollute the air everyone breathes.

Few editorial writers, columnists or talking heads will claim responsibility for perpetuating this false perspective. Neither, of course, will politicians, academics or clerics. But that's another story. ■

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Laredo, Texas. *Aerial photography by J. Michael Short.*

the California Air Resources Board (CARB), established that the devices allowed NOx emissions far exceeding those allowed under California as well as federal law. In 1997, CARB notified the EPA of this result. When the EPA announced its settlement in 1998, the agency claimed to have discovered the emission problems "last year." Meyerhoff's law firm, Milberg Weiss

and Browner announced the settlement. A long-time authority on corporate crime, he became the first Division Chief to address a Corporate Crime Reporter luncheon.

"Why no criminal prosecution?" I asked him, referring to the diesel case but not citing the evidence that the EPA may have bungled its opportunity to seek one.

Against the Commercial Impulse

An author argues for journalism being a vital force in democracy.

By Jeffrey Scheuer

American democracy is in a state of political depression because the electorate is neither active nor well informed. In addition, according to a recent Pew Center poll, 38 percent of Americans think the media hurt our democracy, while only 45 percent believe they help it. (Of course, there's a lot of mindless media bashing as well, but that's another matter.) Let's put it this way. When it comes to civic matters, the public is not inundated with trenchant reporting, insightful commentary, or truthful, informative political ads. And most eligible Americans don't bother to vote. These are interconnected problems that journalists, among others, should spend some time thinking about.

When we focus on the media these days, we pay too much attention to the dazzling array of new gadgets and technologies and the wonders of the Internet. Forget all that for a moment. Besides, the actual impact of those marvels is vastly overstated anyway. Let's concentrate instead on the real business of journalism—educating the public in things civic and otherwise. Through that lens, I'd like to briefly explore the connections of the news media to money, politics and democratic culture.

First of all, the media cannot be understood or judged as an isolated sector of society. In all kinds of ways, media are connected to one another and to other sectors: politics, government, business, popular culture, and education.

Second, there's enough good journalism around, if one knows where to look for it and wants to find it. All of the problems of our media-industrial-political complex are not the media's fault. We need to consider demand as well as supply.

But there are problems close to home. There is the increasing economic concentration and the forms of corruption and self censorship that these engender. There is the allure of "infotainment" and the temptation for tabloid treatment of ordinary news. And there are many ways today in which core journalistic values of integrity, fairness, accuracy, full disclosure, and sound news judgment are being tarnished and compromised.

Many of these flaws can be traced to one grand contradiction underlying American (and most other) news media. On one hand, virtually all journalism is commercially based or ultimately market dependent, even in the non-profit sector. As such, it cannot help being driven by conservative imperatives, which put profits ahead of the public interest.

Yet media in a democracy also have a crucial public function: to promote and inform our essential democratic debate. So even though media are ensconced in the private sector, the journalistic enterprise (not unlike the mission of public libraries and public education) is essentially an egalitarian and even a liberal one. Its function is to empower ordinary citizens by being their constant watchdogs and questioning the powers that be (state, corporate, or otherwise), always digging more deeply and diffusing more information than those powerful institutions would like.

In fact, the quality and credibility of journalism depend directly on its independence from commercial pressures. That is why secure firewalls between the business and editorial sides of news organizations are essential. As the Los Angeles Times discovered recently, this firewall is a load-bearing wall. Removing it collapses journalistic integrity.

Media and Money

In the long run, we need to resolve this contradiction by finding ways to insulate journalists and their practice from such commercial pressures. An enduring trust for public broadcasting, free of the heavy hand of Congress and its lobbyists, would be a good place to start. Another would be a more diverse and competitive environment of media pluralism. Ben Bagdikian and Robert W. McChesney [See James Carey's review of McChesney's book on page 67], among others, have written eloquently on this subject. We need anti-trust oversight, too, to diversify our sources of information before we're reduced to the single voice of Big Mouse.

Any change in the media system affects all of the interconnected parts. Thus, the role and performance of the press cannot be divorced from the issue of financial contributions in politics, or from the most important constitutional question now confronting the American people: What is speech?

In *Buckley vs. Valeo* (1976), the Supreme Court in effect equated money with speech. Our political system is—to put it delicately—an influence auction, awash in hard and soft money. The Court might now be backing away from that view; Justice John Paul Stevens, arguing for the majority last January in *Nixon v. Shrink Missouri Government PAC*, expressed the quaint view that "Money is property; it is not speech."

Many Americans might agree with that formulation. Perhaps writing, speaking, even the boorish fever swamp of talk radio are closer than campaign expenditures to what the Framers envisioned as the jewel in the crown of American liberties. But the question of

what constitutes “speech” in the context of our political system ought to be made explicit as part of this election year debate, especially since the next President could appoint the justices who will determine the direction of the court for the next generation.

Media and Politics

There is room in a diverse media environment for outlets of all ideological stripes and also for ostensible neutrality. But news outlets must follow the polestar of being fierce advocates not for the left or right, but for frequent and lively and open debate. Journalists should address their audiences not as though they are commercial or political targets but as citizens, consumers, parents, students and members of our communities.

The objective of journalism, as E.J. Dionne, Jr. writes in his book “They Only Look Dead: Why Progressives Will Dominate the Next Political Era,” should be “to salvage [Walter] Lippmann’s devotion to accuracy and fairness by putting these virtues to the service of the democratic debate that [John] Dewey so valued. This means, in turn, that journalism needs to be concerned with far more than its professional rules and imperatives.”

In this regard, the civic journalism movement has got it at least half right. Of course we need to promote active and informed citizenship. What we don’t need is news driven by surveys, opinion polls, or focus groups. This is less journalism than market research masquerading as democracy. Nor do journalists need to become civic boosters. Their more effective and proper role is that of a questioning watchdog, at times acting contrary to the sway of popular opinion, despite commercial pressures to do otherwise. And it is their business to decide what’s news.

Acting in the best interests of a democratic society, however, does not mean denigrating or sublimating ideology. On the contrary, journalists need to be able to appreciate all shades of reasonable opinion and respect the dignity of ideological argument. Ideology is like the weather: We might not like it, but it

isn’t disreputable and it won’t go away.

Television, as a medium, is inherently cynical. That is, by the very nature of its visual orientation it leans toward coverage of the means and gamesmanship of politics, toward stories that depend on emotion more than on the substance of issues or values. It is quick to expose scandals and character flaws, slow to consider deeper motives, intentions, or ideas. TV abhors thoughtful ideological debate. But it is naive to suppose that bipartisan “practical” solutions can be found to important problems. Partisanship is about real differences of power and interest. It isn’t just a fog obscuring the real political terrain, but the terrain itself. Journalism that serves democracy must recognize this and not denigrate intelligent partisanship.

Facts are important too, and gathering and sorting them are essential journalistic functions. But indisputable facts are where our real debates begin—debates about values, causes and principles. It is not where they end.

Media and Education

If facts are where we start from, then journalism schools ought to provide more than vocational training for the harvesting of facts. Good journalists are not just brokers of information but educators of the public. Like all good teachers, journalists should themselves be students of human nature and society. Instead of just teaching people how to produce journalism, we should teach them to be better critics and consumers of journalism. In effect, we need to integrate journalism education into studies in elementary and secondary schools, as media literacy and media education.

Prospective journalists should learn not just to meet a deadline, but to explain, inform and analyze civic debate. More importantly, we need to teach youngsters how to think critically about the enormous amounts of information they can now access and not just hardwire them to the Internet and consider our job done. Real education, Yeats said, is “not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”

Critical thinking applies to journalism too. In part, it means making important distinctions that are too often obscured. A good place to start would be by distinguishing between the public and private lives of public figures. Suggestion: Lose the smarmy rationalizations for tabloid coverage of private matters and just say no.

Journalism that serves democracy also requires some mundane but important things: issue-oriented coverage; head-to-head debates between opposing points of view on the same page or time slot; muckraking and investigative reporting; ombudsman oversight and media criticism; facilitation of public activism. For example, important public meetings in any community should be listed in advance on a public service page or station. (There’s a radical idea.) So should names and Web sites of relevant organizations on all sides of key issues.

Finally, what promotes democratic culture is quality, not just quantity or profits. Among other things, journalists have lost sight of the public purpose of competition within their business; reporters should worry less about getting it first and more about getting it best. Some elements of the media inevitably will—and perhaps should—focus on the impregnation of celebrities by alien visitors. But if “bread and circuses” cannot be dismissed, neither can the need for quality in public information and debate and, conjointly, for public education that produces the demand for it.

Viewing journalism as a form of education is elitist, I’ll admit. Education is the diffusion of knowledge from the elite to the masses. The truly dangerous elite, however, is the one we need most—and the one all good journalism strives to enlarge. This would be an information elite of astute, informed media critics and political activists, with a membership comprising every American citizen. ■

Jeffrey Scheuer is the author of “The Sound Bite Society: Television and the American Mind” (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1999), from which this article is adapted.

'Journalism and Democracy Are Names for the Same Thing.'

A book raises journalists from their self-interested complacency.

Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times

Robert W. McChesney

University of Illinois Press. 448 Pages. \$32.95.

By James W. Carey

The only cheery journalism news of the past year was the revolt of Manchester United fans blocking Rupert Murdoch from buying their football club. Otherwise, things are dreary. AOL plans to absorb Time Warner, and the Tribune Company, which owns an undisclosed portion of AOL, swallows the Times Mirror Company. This is the latest chapter in an old story: the disappearance of an independent press, of journalism itself, into the information and entertainment industry. Where are the fans of journalism, and should we be concerned?

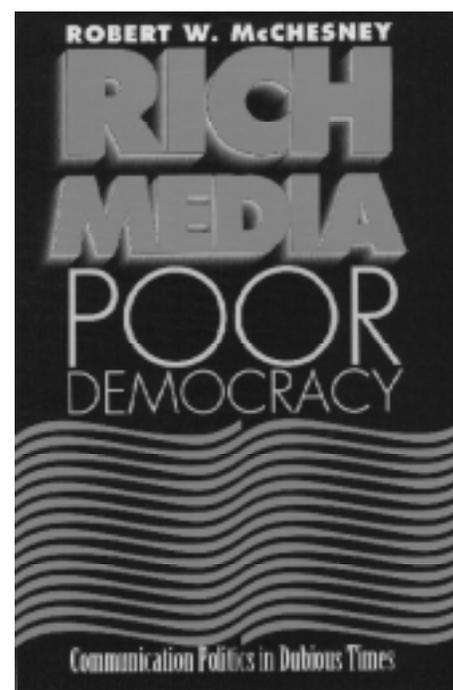
The situation of the press is paradoxical. There is more good journalism about, in all media, but such journalism is harder to find because it is surrounded and submerged in the trivial and inconsequential. Much first-class investigative work is going on, but the big stories, the fateful stories, are escaping journalists. Media are more powerful and resourceful than ever, but political participation and attentiveness to the news continues to decline. There are many more skillful, better paid and educated journalists these days, but they have less control over the conditions of their work and are less free than in the past. Journalists are afforded more legal protection than ever, but are simultaneously more pious and reverent to the business and celebrity classes.

Robert McChesney, Research Professor of Communications at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, tells this paradoxical story in numbing and disheartening detail in "Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times," a splendid

book that deserves close reading and thoughtful consideration by anyone who cares about the future of the press and democracy. The title tells it all: The media are richer and more powerful and democracy thinner and more impotent than at any time in memory.

The book extends a long muckraking tradition that stretches back to Upton Sinclair's "The Brass Check" (1920) and George Seldes's "Lords of the Press" (1938). Its immediate predecessor is Ben Bagdikian's "The Media Monopoly" (1983). Actually, it is not a successor to the latter for the esteemed Mr. Bagdikian has an equally dispiriting fifth edition of his work coming out this spring. What all these books share is the belief that freedom of the press and the craft of journalism itself, along with democracy and representative government, is endangered by the epidemic of merger and acquisition that is creating a concentrated, thoroughly commercial, increasingly monopolistic media system.

If McChesney and Bagdikian are correct, journalists have to abandon their neutral and agnostic stance, at least on this story. Journalists can be independent or objective about everything else but they cannot be aloof about democracy, for it forms the ground condition of their craft. Without the institutions of democracy, journalists are reduced to propagandists or entertainers. The passion for democracy is the one necessary bond journalists must have with the public and their colleagues in other crafts—law, teaching—who are equally dependent on democratic institutions. No journalism, no democracy; but, equally, no democ-



racy, no journalism. Journalism and democracy are names for the same thing.

I know the response: Journalists need not get involved; journalism is too strong, democracy too entrenched for anything to go seriously wrong in the United States. This is shortsighted. The Founding Fathers were historians enough to know that democracies or republics have a life expectancy of about 200 years before decaying into tyranny. They underscored that democratic institutions are fragile, the moments of their existence fleeting in historical time. The great imperative of journalism is to prevent us from unconsciously lurching back into domination, however benign and friendly its face.

We now seem to take democratic institutions for granted as if they are indestructible. Journalists seem to believe that democratic politics, which alone underwrites their craft, is a self-perpetuating machine that will run of itself, that can withstand any amount of undermining. Nothing is further from the truth.

The dangers that the government poses to journalism and democracy are well rehearsed. McChesney documents in abundant detail an equally strong case against what he calls the “corporate media.” He updates the story to take account of the increasing convergence of the entertainment, journalism and Internet industries. Because the book is the first of the genre written after the breakup of the Soviet Union, it is mercifully free of the Cold War posturing that undermined many earlier efforts to tell this story.

While he devotes considerable attention to the perils and promises that the Internet holds out for journalists, he concludes, correctly I believe, that for all the short-run gains offered by the new technology, it is leading to a new wave of concentration in the press and a more thoroughly commercialized and corporate-dominated press system.

McChesney is particularly acute on the transformation of the meaning of the First Amendment that has silently

political right—a collective right to accessible and accountable democratic institutions—is being replaced by the notion that the First Amendment principally confers an enhanced property right to the owners of the media, a right to operate with greater license (and profits) than is possible, say, under the Fifth Amendment.

In our time the First Amendment is ceasing to have the implication of a public trust held by the press in the name of a wider community. It is being converted from a political right to an exclusively economic one and democracy comes to mean solely economic democracy, though even that comes in the degenerate form of greater inequality. Journalists must recognize that the corporate meaning of the First Amendment is inimical to their and the public’s interest. They must align themselves with the public and reduce their slavish dependence on captains of industry and their legal advisors. The question is this: What kind of a First Amendment do citizens and journalists need if they are to undertake the work of democracy? They need something more than a license to make money and to turn the political system into a commercial arena for profligate advertising and consumption of politics.

In an elegiac “farewell to journalism,” McChesney lays out his case

over, stories harmful to the interests of that class have largely disappeared or been subordinated into minor episodes: the savings and loan scandal (until politicians chose to reveal it), the defense budget that expands despite the peace dividend, foreign policy, the national security state, and the Multilateral Agreement on Investment.)

Journalism seems dedicated these days to cultivating cynicism about democracy and worship of wealth. When there is a division of interest within the business class, say on tobacco, the story gets covered. When there is consensus within that class, the story is either ignored or subject to a standard of proof beyond what is required for reporting on other sectors. Moreover, the story of the conditions of common work, of the inequalities of wealth and income, and the labor movement have disappeared from the pages of journalism while excessive attention is paid to malfeasance in education, welfare and product liability, areas that drain monies away from the corporate sector.

If during the 1930’s the automobile and steel interests had attempted to buy the press—as they did in parts of Europe—it would have been seen as a threat to freedom and democracy, indeed as the beginnings of fascism. If during the shortages of the 1970’s the oil industry had decided to buy up the press, as they were tempted to do, there would have been an outcry of protest. Today, the entertainment and information industries, increasingly indistinguishable, are buying up the press and the press is transforming itself into an arm of these same industries. Where’s the protest?

Entertainment and information play the role in national and international economies that steel, autos and oil played in earlier decades, but we are beguiled by the words “communications” and “media” into thinking that it constitutes less of a threat. Robert McChesney’s valuable book will perform a public service if it does nothing more than raise us from our self-interested complacency. ■

James Carey is a professor at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

What kind of a First Amendment do citizens and journalists need if they are to undertake the work of democracy?

occurred in recent years. The major Supreme Court cases that have slowly and patiently removed restraints on the press have done so in the name of overriding public purposes: to facilitate debate, to constitute an adversary of entrenched power, to create a transparent society, to air the public’s business, to promote responsive institutions, the press included. This is the core of the political meaning of the press and it is a badge of honor journalists regularly parade. Increasingly, this

against the corporate press. Part of the case is questionable, based on inattentive reading of journalism, inflated by left-wing rhetoric with a whiff of political correctness. However, the major thrust of his argument is correct. The corporate sector is increasingly exempt from any sustained critical examination from the standpoint of democracy. The story of industrial concentration is an investor’s story, appealing to and lionizing the business class as the great engine of democracy itself. More-

Can the Press Win Back the Public's Confidence?

A First Amendment lawyer argues it must.

Don't Shoot the Messenger:

How Our Growing Hatred of the Media Threatens Free Speech for All of Us

Bruce W. Sanford

The Free Press. 257 Pages. \$25.

By Lorie Hearn

There's nothing like a good First Amendment fight to make journalists feel we're doing something right for America. But if we listen to media lawyer Bruce Sanford, the battles we've fought over the past decade or so have done little to endear us to the public we desperately want to reach.

If this continues, Sanford predicts, we're all in for an extremely unpleasant future. A bit hyperbolic, maybe, but this prominent First Amendment attorney is clear: The public and the courts have grown increasingly hostile toward the media, and that can only mean erosion of constitutional rights for everyone.

We need the public. And in his book, "Don't Shoot the Messenger: How Our Growing Hatred of the Media Threatens Free Speech for All of Us," Sanford makes the point that the public needs us, despite our considerable faults. Who would you rather have looking out for your best interests, the media or the government? The way things are going, most of us probably don't want to hear the answer. Sanford hammers on the media's missteps and the price we're paying for them. It took a couple of decades for us to dig this hole, and Sanford concludes that climbing out requires regaining public confidence—a tall order.

The book doesn't tell us much we don't already know about public-opinion polls that fillet us, about libel verdicts and court losses, about the stereotypes we proliferate. But it's a reality check to view so much bad acting on one stage. "Don't Shoot the Messen-

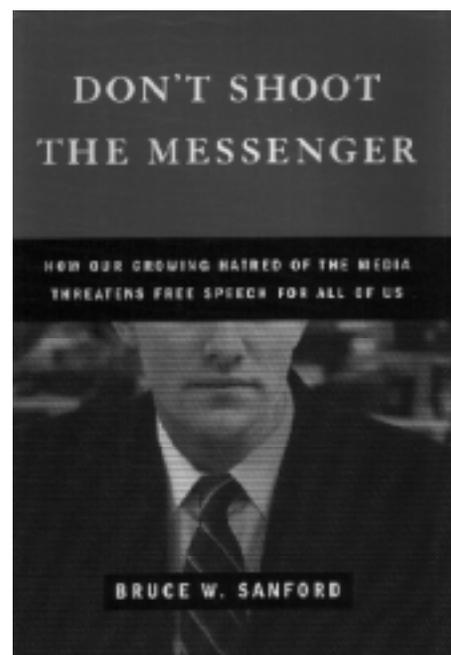
ger," culled from hundreds of interviews, legal cases and reportage, builds a case for virtually unrestricted media freedoms. Sanford's argument is that every battle lost by the media represents a loss in rights for all.

Sanford cites cases that have been settled rather than tried (the Cincinnati Chiquita case against Gannett among them), and he worries media companies are settling not on the merits of a case but out of fear of jaded juries. He quotes a juror in a record \$222.7 million libel case against The Wall Street Journal saying she wanted to punish the media. And Sanford suggests judges may be telling us we don't respect the rights we have, so why should we be given more?

A quick look in the mirror might be necessary. We have reporters-turned-celebrities debating issues they are supposed to be covering. Media conglomerates—fixated on stockholders and the bottom line—are swallowing up whole markets. Too many companies spend too little on quality journalism, which is the only thing that separates us from "content providers" and "advertorial" producers.

Sanford doesn't put all the blame on the media. We're also battling American culture, he says. How do we connect with a public that says news is too biased, sensational and superficial yet can't seem to get enough of O.J., Monica and "Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire"?

We as journalists have to assume responsibility, but so must the corporations who own the newspapers, television and radio stations and electronic



information sources where we work. I cheer Sanford when he talks about the need to reinvest profits in journalism—the soul of these businesses. And I add that these corporations have a responsibility to make sure there are clear lines between the editorial product and those who advertise in it. In polls, the public indicates it doesn't put much stock in information on the Internet because the lines are difficult to distinguish. News of such conflicts as the Staples Center fiasco at the Los Angeles Times only deepens suspicion about our motives.

Sanford concludes that people no longer see us as a vehicle for improving life for ordinary Americans. That is hard-est to hear. People always have had a

love/hate relationship with newspapers but have believed in their fundamental worth, even in the yellow days that inspired the term “muckraking.”

I got into journalism during a heyday, when Woodward and Bernstein were holding a President’s feet to the fire and the courts were slapping government’s overreaching hand. Reporting was a noble calling, and we answered in droves. It was all about questioning authority, exposing wrongdoing, speaking for the little guy, explaining the complex in hopes of helping to change the world for the better.

Most of us haven’t changed our reasons for doing what we do. But Sanford reminds us of how much around us has changed, particularly in this new information age, to widen the rift between the media and the public. People see

our hidden cameras and our accompanying police on raids as violations of privacy, not as acting in our capacity as the Fourth Estate, a check on the three branches of government.

Sanford worries, as we all should, that the public has become distracted by the process of journalism and has lost sight of its purpose. He cites hope in the efforts of organizations such as the Committee of Concerned Journalists. Having a singular message is a good thing but walking the talk on a local level is paramount. Newspaper readers, for example, don’t want saber rattling or First Amendment speeches. They want relevant facts, in context, devoid of the journalist’s opinion.

Sanford connects the dots pretty well between action and consequence, but I’m afraid he doesn’t make the case

about the severity of the consequences convincingly enough to gain the buy-in of the public. (And some of his arguments—about the need to educate judges about cameras in courtrooms, for example—sound almost patronizing and might actually alienate some readers.)

In the end, journalists might take some solace in Sanford’s observation that the damage to press protections is not all our fault. But his sobering conclusion is: Repairing and strengthening them is entirely up to us—and the companies we work for. ■

Lorie Hearn is the Metro Editor of The San Diego Union-Tribune. She was a reporter for 20 years before going into editing and is a 1995 Nieman Fellow.

‘Things Are Not OK.’

An author argues that journalism’s watchdogs are being silenced by greed.

Uncertain Guardians: The News Media as a Political Institution

Bartholomew H. Sparrow

Johns Hopkins University Press. 266 Pages. \$48 hc, \$17.95 pb.

By Jim Tharpe

Bartholomew Sparrow has put the American news media under a microscope and come to a simple conclusion. Things are not only not okay, they are downright lousy.

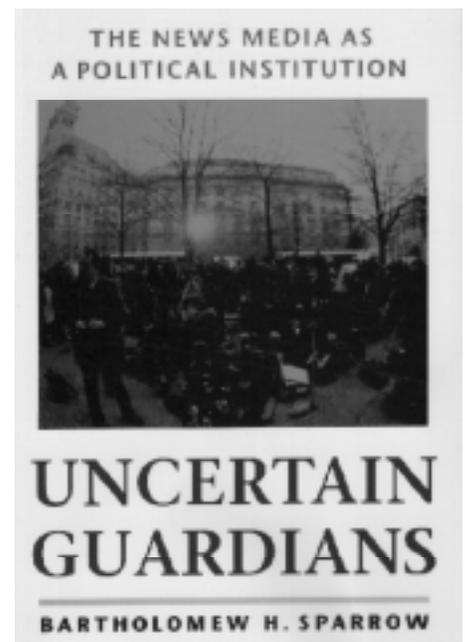
In “Uncertain Guardians: The News Media as a Political Institution,” Sparrow contends the media are no longer guardians of the public interest. Once proud and independent watchdogs, reporters, editors and producers have been reduced to little more than lap dogs for larcenous, Wall Street-driven corporations and manipulative government officials from Ronald Reagan to Bill Clinton whose handlers have become practiced spinners of the truth.

The press is rarely adversarial these days, Sparrow argues, and usually rears its collective head only when the promi-

nent elites on which it feeds are in conflict with each other.

“For all the preeminence of the watchdog or guardian role of the news media, I argue that the ‘fourth estate’ model of the news media is fundamentally wrong,” he writes. “Only rarely and to a limited extent are the news media able to act as significant checks on national government or as advocates of a broader public interest.”

Sparrow admits early on that his is an interpretive project since there are no databases on editors’ decisions about what to publish, or on the credibility of politicians, or about how political and economic considerations impact what ends up in print or on the air. An associate professor of government at the University of Texas, Spar-



row manages a scholarly tone through his argument with more than 60 pages of sourcing notes.

Perhaps his most damning conclusions come in the chapter appropriately titled “Making Money and Making News.” Here Sparrow details how the news business has become just another business driven by publicly owned companies’ desire to maximize profits at the expense of in-depth and controversial reporting. In one two-page section, he provides a long list of media companies that inhabit the Fortune 500 and segues into recent takeovers where already huge corporations gobble up their smaller competitors in the pursuit of even greater profits. He makes the point that these mega-mergers will continue, a conclusion underscored by the fact that Time Warner, which he points out merged with Turner Broadcasting, has since the book’s publication announced a mega-merger with America Online.

Sparrow points out that newspaper giants like Gannett have been able to take over smaller newspaper companies and squeeze profits of up to 40 percent through a variety of draconian measures, which have left their media properties increasingly devoid of substance. This has been good for the accountants who run the corporations,

good for the stockholders whose portfolios have soared, but a disaster for a profession whose true believers were always dependent on some degree of benevolence from those controlling the purse strings.

The bottom line in American journalism at the dawning of the new millennium is increasingly the bottom line, Sparrow concludes.

Even journalists, once the champions of the underdog, have gotten in on the greed game. Sparrow recalled this anecdote by a Washington bureau chief for NBC: “When the stock market crashed in 1929, the newspaper reporters at The Boston Globe cheered; when the market crashed in 1987, they ran and called their stockbrokers.”

Sparrow recounts a number of recent reporter sins including the general (at least initial) acceptance of the Reagan Administration’s lies about the Soviet downing of Korean airliner KAL 007, the boosterish coverage of the Gulf War in which scores of Iraqi citizens were killed by so-called “smart bombs,” and the absence of oversight when billions of dollars were lifted from taxpayers’ pockets by special interest groups as part of the savings and loan bailout.

Despite the dismal view of the state of the craft, Sparrow is not without

hope or suggestions about how to fix the mess in which he envisions the press. He proposes the government tax advertising revenues while subsidizing the media based on their ability to attract circulation—a noble idea, but one that powerful corporations with forceful lobbying arms would certainly squash. A breakup of media ownership concentrations is also a good idea, Sparrow asserts, but he is well aware that things are moving fast in the other direction, accelerated by the 1996 Telecommunications Act.

On more practical ground, Sparrow proposes that the media take a tougher and more skeptical stance when dealing with government policy pronouncements, provide more detailed coverage of political and economic news, and pursue civic journalism by engaging the local community.

“Things are not OK,” Sparrow wrote in a response to a critique of his book. “But the situation that Congress, the media, and the public have created, the Congress, the media, and the public can work to reform.” ■

Jim Tharpe is Deputy Metro Editor of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. He has worked at newspapers in Florida, South Carolina, and Alabama. He is a 1989 Nieman Fellow.

Why Should the Public Trust Journalists?

A long-time journalist looks outside his practice for answers.

Republic of Denial: Press, Politics, and Public Life

Michael Janeway

Yale University Press. 256 Pages. \$22.50.

By Cara DeVito

Today many journalists lament compromises in their practice that they feel pressured to make due to bottom-line imperatives. In his book, “Republic of Denial,” long-time journalist Michael Janeway (The Atlantic Monthly and The Boston Globe) connects the contemporary slippage

in standards of journalism to the broader context of America’s social history. In analyzing the sorry state of journalism, Janeway skillfully links the circumstances of this situation with what is and has been happening in politics and civic engagement during the past 50 years.

Janeway writes about “a culture of suspicion” and quotes Washington Post columnist James Broder, who observed that this pervasive attitude “saps people’s confidence in politics and public officials.... If the assumption is that nothing is on the level, nothing is what it seems, then citizenship becomes

a game for fools and there is no point in trying to stay informed.”

It is this presumption that now makes much of journalism (and citizenship) seem a fool’s sport. It is what pushed me to leave a 17-year career at NBC News. The first day I returned to work after my Nieman year, I walked into an NBC edit room and found tacked to its wall a New York Post front-page headline: “NBC Breaks Story—Monica Had Sex with Bill.”

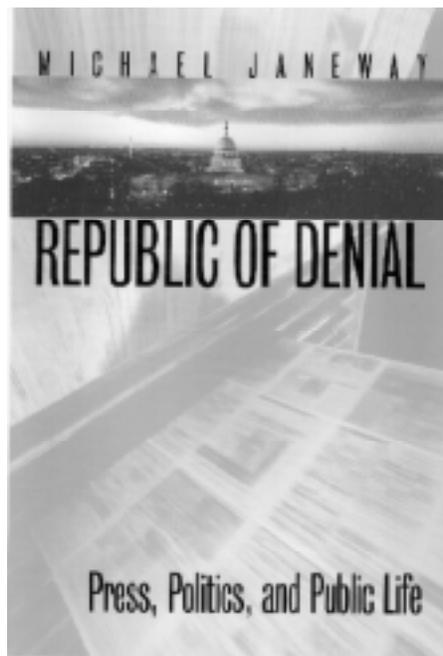
A queasy stomach became my first visceral reaction. At that moment I realized that we, in the news business, would be blitzed with the ghoulishly recurring shot of Monica in her beret, receiving the President’s arm on her shoulder in public with all the savory deception that image evokes. And then it hit me that I was part of the machine perpetuating these sensationalistic icons, masquerading as news. Prior to that moment, I’d hung on to the conviction that the small victories I eked out broadcasting stories which were unnoticed by the other networks made it worthwhile to stay at this work. Suddenly I felt engulfed by the sense that news being fed into this machine was being homogenized by new imperatives. To me, it seemed as though television news was subsuming content into a new paradigm of soap opera escapism. A similar dynamic appears to make my 12-year-old daughter reject articles I cut from respectable newspapers for her to read. She tells me “newspapers are evil,” and she categorically defines all news as bad news, something to be avoided at all costs.

How can I nurture the belief that what happens in the world around her has the potential to create good, as well as wreak havoc, in the lives of us, as citizens? Part of the journalist’s mandate is to be the public’s watchdog. When did we become bloodhounds, with apparently no detail considered off-limits and the presumption of guilt too often present at the starting line?

Janeway suggests journalists seek understanding by reflecting on the broader cultural shifts. “Writ large,” Janeway writes, “the story is about the sobering awakening from the postwar American dream. Of the fading of American command of its own destiny and of

the free world’s.... Of disintegration of a culture of assurance and consensus, one that embraced near universal concepts of sacrifice and duty—including military service, wartime rationing, broad-based sense of participation in the course of a national destiny—into a culture of separatism, self-preoccupied materialism, and doubt.”

The intertwining of journalism, politics and social attitudes cannot be disentangled from the larger American narrative. During the late 1960’s, dissolution of a national heroism and



optimism began with a series of shock waves to our democratic identity. Janeway buttresses his argument with contributions of political scientists and scholars, such as Harvard’s Michael J. Sandel, whom he quotes: “At home and abroad, events spun out of control, and government seemed helpless to respond.”

Janeway marks this period as a pivotal transition. Prior to the 1960’s, politicians such as Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill knew that democratic leaders not only had to be accessible, but “that direct communication with the public was an opportunity, not a burden.... Thus, media and democracy seemed to have become productively intertwined, a modern, open marriage of free access between the

information marketplace and the political arena.”

Then journalists began uncovering lie after lie, from politicians withholding information for “the good of the nation.” After President Kennedy’s assassination, conspiracy theories surfaced. Lyndon Johnson’s Vietnam strategies weakened public trust, as did the violence used against anti-war protesters at the Democratic convention in 1968 and the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy. Watergate then destroyed it. “The party in power had lost control of the issues of war and peace, and law and order, along with that of race,” Janeway writes. “The Democratic Party—the party that from Jefferson to Johnson by way of Roosevelt had defined, redefined and fought for the aspirations of the American common man—set about reforming itself. But it never recovered from the events of 1968.”

As both parties faltered, wrote political scientist Thomas Patterson, reformers “established a nominating process that is essentially a free-for-all between self-generated candidates,” and television took over “the task of bringing the candidates and voters together.” The arena of candidate selection, Patterson contends, shifted from a political party structure in an engaged civil society to “a media system that was built for other purposes.”

Janeway develops that theme. “Television’s currency and forms were images, acting skills, management of the moment, fast cutting in and out of a fragmented visual environment—and entertainment. These supplanted the forms of the old order of national, state and local politics: radio sound and printed word of landmark speeches, the bustle of handshaking, grassroots, ‘retail’ politics.... Political content on television was more and more framed in the only format that appeared to arouse a response (albeit a diminishing one): the reductive, vitriolic distortions of the negative advertisement.”

What had once been the machinations of the American political process became the purview of electronic journalists. In this way, active civic responsibility was forfeited to a handful of talking heads who controlled access to

candidates (by whom they decide to cover and how they choose to cover them.) Thus TV news acquired a power it never had before, certainly one unanticipated in the Constitution.

Enter into this mix the technology explosion and proliferation of cable stations, and what occurs is a further splintering of the news audience. Soon newspapers as well as TV stations appeared willing to allow some of their standards to slip if would mean selling more papers (or creating “a buzz”) and gaining audience share.

News continues to be sensationalized to attract audiences. Concurrently, the public becomes even more disaffected, sated with untruth and tragedy. Of course, this transformation is more complex than any short overview can embrace. But a central question regarding journalism remains: How do journalists return to the province of watchdog reporting, with the objective of providing the kind of information

citizens need to meaningfully participate in their democratic institutions?

Certainly we should not use as our roadmap some of the questionable “news” practices of recent times. CBS News recreates its logo in virtual space and places its venerable anchor Dan Rather in front of it, thereby deceiving its viewers as to what is real. Or as Hillary Rodham Clinton prepares to announce her senate candidacy she avoids interviews with journalists, deciding instead to face pre-screened questions from David Letterman. Or the announcement of the merger of Ralph Lauren and NBC “in a new media company that will promote the designer’s products online and on-the-air,” which the New York Times predicted will “further blur the line between content and commerce at traditional media companies.”

Janeway maintains that the true fall from grace for American journalism came when the machinations of politi-

cal process left local communities and became the purview of a select group of television correspondents. The question remains of how political power is returned to ordinary citizens and a renewed sense of pride and engagement in our (once cherished) democratic process is engendered. To accomplish this, do journalists need to—and will they be willing to—forfeit the power they have assumed and return to the province of respected watchdog of those who hold power? These are questions that no one—not journalists, publishers, politicians or scholars—can answer with any measure of certainty. ■

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Journalism and Citizenship

Should there be connections?

What are Journalists For?

By Jay Rosen

Yale University Press. 352 Pages. \$29.95.

By Ellen Hume

To take a fresh look at Jay Rosen’s provocative question “What Are Journalists For?” as well as the decade-long debate he helped to inspire within American journalism, it is instructive to spend time here in post-Communist Europe. Czech journalists have not gained the kind of agenda-setting influence that preoccupies Rosen and other American press reformers. Ten years after the Velvet Revolution, they are divided and depressed, operating in the sort of “fear or favor” political culture that The New York Times’s motto disclaims. Getting journalists to ask the pertinent questions,

to find out what the government actually is doing, and to publish or broadcast the answers, is surprisingly difficult here.

Czech reporters feel that when they do report on corruption, no one listens. “What do you do when the first privatizations—and tunneling [of assets to improper people]—are the newspapers themselves?” one newspaperman despaired as he explained why his investigative zeal had collapsed. And when the press disclosed illegalities, the courts did not seem to follow up and political leaders circled the wagons instead of throwing out the

bad guys. In this environment, why should newspaper companies, now owned by media corporations from Germany and Switzerland, take on the Czech political power structure?

Without much credibility or other source of influence, Czech journalists increasingly are vulnerable to political intervention. Late last year, the Czech Parliament prepared to pass a disastrous press law featuring a news subject’s “right of reply” regardless of the truth of the original article. In a moment of rare *chutzpah*, Czech newspapers published hypothetical pages scarred with blank spaces, indicating

what would happen to their reporting if this law was passed. But instead of hammering away on this issue of basic survival, the newspapers then dropped the issue and the pressure was off. Only when international free press groups picked up the fight, and the European Union issued a scathing report on the proposed law, did the bill evolve into a more reasonable measure.

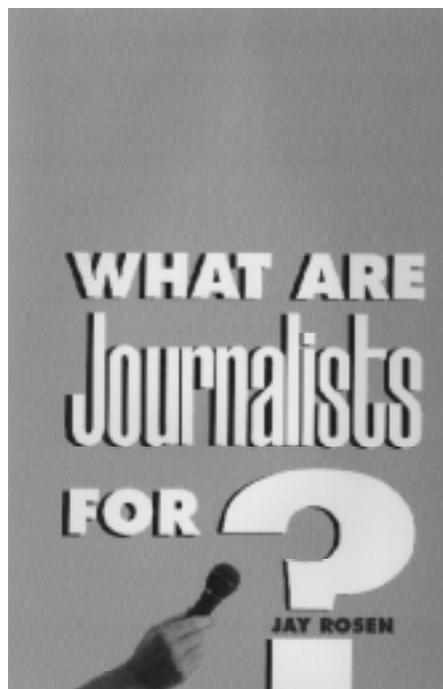
Now the two ruling parties appear poised to take joint control of the two Czech public television stations in time for the next legislative elections. Public television represents half of the nation's four broadcast stations, while satellite and cable are still foreign-content luxuries. One has only to look next door to Hungary to see what the political lynching of national television would look like. There, the government's decision to appoint only government party members to the boards overseeing state television and radio has stifled opposition news, according to the International Press Institute. Budapest Mayor Gabor Demszky, in an opposition party, found that for the first time in nine years his Hungarian national dayspeech would not be broadcast. "Freedom of the press is endangered," he told *The Washington Post's* Peter Finn.

To be sure, some courageous Czech reporters haven't given up, and a new freedom of information act became law January 1. But Czech journalists still have not created any leverage for themselves. They are not waiting in a pack outside the politicians' closed doors; they don't even pick up threads of each other's investigative stories. Lacking the critical mass or legal protections of America's press corps, Czech journalists need something else—something like objectivity or public journalism—to legitimize their work.

Jay Rosen's call for American journalists to make democracy their responsibility is especially poignant in this post-Communist setting, where neither journalists nor citizens are accustomed to having access to government information or influence over their nation's fate. People here are weary of hearing bad news, suspicious of both the politicians and the press,

and unaware of their own potential role in shaping a better future. Sound familiar? These were the kinds of complaints about American democracy that inspired Rosen's public journalism and similar civic journalism efforts by the Pew Charitable Trusts and others 10 years ago.

"Are we telling the story of our public life in a way that invites people in, gives them a task?" Rosen asked American journalists in 1995, encouraging them to join the public/civic journalism movement. Public journalists like Buzz Merritt at *The Wichita Eagle* engaged citizen attention to community



issues by organizing town hall meetings and creating temporary media alliances to blitz the region with special reports on such important civic topics as crime, racism and education. At more than 200 news organizations during the past decade, civic journalists rethought their approach to news, transforming the usual voyeur stories about crime, scandals and elections by asking in what ways citizens might contribute and then making that information available.

Ironically, just when new democracies need them the most, civic journalism and objectivity both seem passé in

America. Young journalists feel that it's more rewarding to offer news with "attitude," popularized by the Internet gadflies, sassy columnists, and talk show pundits. Such reporting may seem fresh and entertaining. But it's not much real use for citizens in a democracy, particularly here in post-Communist Central Europe, where basic information is still difficult to find.

Rosen's proposals for an engaged press and the subsequent experiments at newspapers like *The Charlotte Observer* and *Miami Herald* touched off a nuclear war with the Old Guard at *The New York Times* and other newspapers. As Rosen recounted in "What are Journalists For?," the fervent opposition came from American journalism's most influential leaders, including Max Frankel of *The New York Times*, Max King of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, David Remnick of *The Washington Post* (now Editor of *The New Yorker*) and Michael Kelly, of the *National Journal* and now of *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Both Rosen and his critics overreacted to each other, missing the opportunity for broader reforms. Rosen sabotaged the acceptance of public journalism among the very people who should have appreciated it most, by saying that journalists should abandon their detachment and take responsibility for the civic impact of their stories. There need be "no sharp boundary" between journalism "and other varieties of civic work," he said. But objectivity, for all its bad reputation among scholars and pundits, still means something to America's best journalists, who discipline themselves to limit the influence of their own or their advertisers' views in the stories they write. The journalism establishment saw Rosen as a meddling academic whose unnecessary reforms would undermine both their integrity and their power.

Was Rosen's approach the dangerous apostasy that these critics contended?

Judging from public response, civic journalism did far more good than harm, enhancing the journalists' standing in the community and the citizens' willingness to tackle common problems. In places like Charlotte, North

Carolina, for example, citizens mobilized by a media blitz helped lower the crime rate with clean-ups, lawsuits and a new youth center. Civic journalism certainly seems to have been less damaging to the press's credibility (or to the well-being of democratic institutions in that city) than the excessive voyeurism, "strategy" frameworks, and cynical scorekeeping most American journalists employ every day.

The Old Guard journalists also overestimated their own objectivity credentials, as Rosen pointed out. Max Frankel's dictum that journalists should "leave reform to the reformers" was a less than accurate description of Frankel's own New York Times, or for that matter Edward R. Murrow's celebrated "Harvest of Shame" documentary, or the courageous Southern editors who helped legitimize the civil rights movement of the 1960's. One doesn't have to read the books by Susan Tift and Alex Jones, Thomas Patterson, Paul Taylor, Kathleen Hall Jamieson or David Halberstam to be reminded how often journalists influence the policymaking process, even if by accident, or by acts of omission. Even the most "objective" journalists still hope to exert some influence by inspiring a response to the events and issues they cover.

Thus it should not be a threat to a newspaper's independence to host town hall meetings or backyard barbecues, to include citizens' perspectives or to ask citizens what issues are most relevant to their communities. To be sure, it would be a confusion of roles if the journalists ended up promoting the success of their civic meetings rather than telling the truth as well as they could about the discussions' actual success or failure. Rosen conceded that such lapses occurred at the Columbus, Georgia newspaper and at several other public journalism projects and that, in some instances, news organizations misused citizen initiatives to court subscribers. But many of civic journalism's best practitioners and teachers, including Ed Fouhy and Jan Schaffer of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, carefully avoided these mistakes. Rosen's critics seemed unwilling to differenti-

ate between what worked well and what didn't.

When the Public Broadcasting Service's "Democracy Project" brought public journalism to national television, it was objective and civic at the same time. PBS's experimental weekly series "Follow the Money" covered the 1997 political fundraising hearings in Congress by giving citizens a sense of their choices. It combined news of the scandals with reporting on various reform efforts, history, opinion pieces, and humor. A companion Web site offered direct links to more information, citizen comments, a game to test-drive the various reform proposals, and "hot buttons" to groups opposing or pushing various reforms. In contrast, the commercial networks and newspapers scanned the hearings for scandal headlines and political theater.

Like many civic journalism efforts, "Follow the Money" has come and gone. It is sad now, after 10 years of such efforts, to see how discredited Rosen's ideas still remain with the journalism establishment. Public journalism should not have been such a stretch for them, and Rosen should not have depicted it as one. It was not necessary to abandon the attempt to be objective in one's reporting, nor to give up the editor's prerogative, nor to find foundation money for special projects, in order to offer more comprehensive and responsible news to America.

So what, then, are journalists for? This observer must offer a rather depressing reality check. Journalists, alas, are for making money. What is wrong with American journalism is not its overdose of civic engagement, as Rosen's critics predicted, nor the Old Guard's objectivity fetish, as Rosen proposed. Instead, the most serious problem is the increasing influence of corporate managers in defining the news. Whether it is at the Los Angeles Times, surreptitiously promoting their own business deal with a favorable supplement, or at the television networks and newsmagazines, hawking their corporation's latest movie with tie-in news features, the result is damaging to press credibility.

The media's emphasis on celebrity,

entertainment, private lives rather than public policymaking; on punditry, gossip and opinion has proved deeply corrosive to the fading journalistic tradition that knew what it meant when it tried to be objective. As Matt Drudge on the Internet and virtually all the prominent national journalists on the television talk shows keep score for Washington's insider political games, there is more entertainment and less information that citizens need to know.

In the Czech Republic, too, it is easier to draw an audience by mocking the antics of the politicians than by trying to cast a clarifying light. So why not follow the current trend of American journalism: gossip and entertainment? The nation of Dvorak, Kafka and Havel is glued to the worst of American television reruns on TV NOVA. This is a profitable television station that was established after the Velvet Revolution by two former U.S. ambassadors, Ronald Lauder and Mark Palmer, with a Czech partner whom Lauder is now suing over control of the business. NOVA's news is so sensationalized that Czechs joke you need a towel to mop up all the blood. The naked weather lady is another trademark feature, prancing around in full view without anything at all on, until she dons a little scarf around her neck to show that tomorrow, the weather will be cold.

Perhaps some day the Czechs and the Americans will be prattle-fatigued and sell-shocked. But for now, it will be up to people like Jay Rosen—and his critics—to work at perfecting the journalism that democracy deserves. Such efforts are worthwhile because the stakes are high, not just in the United States but out here on the edge, where democracy is just beginning, and both the citizens and journalists need to see what they might be. ■

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Examining the United Nations' Role in Settling Conflicts

Insider journalism leaves too many questions unasked and unanswered.

Deliver Us From Evil: Peacekeepers, Warlords and a World of Endless Conflict

William Shawcross

Simon & Schuster. 447 Pages. \$27.50.

By Roy Gutman

Nothing is harder to do well in foreign affairs coverage than to spot and define the big trends as they unfold. Those reporting from the center of power, whether columnists or "name" journalists who circulate on the power dinner circuit, may be tempted to ignore the facts and let personal belief or sources with their own political agenda be their guide. And reporters in the field, engrossed in unearthing the raw data of policy failure, do not readily pull back to focus on the big picture.

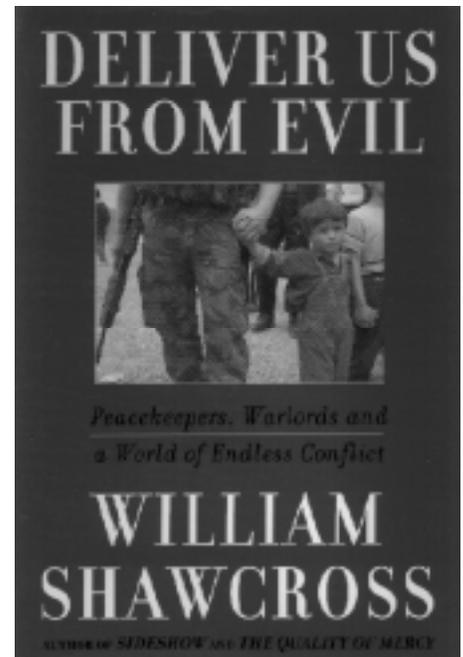
The 1990's illustrate the pitfalls for those who would name the trends. The era opened with the fall of Communism in Russia and Europe, an epochal event that those at the center of power failed to anticipate, analyze or digest. Equally unanticipated was the horrendous series of atrocities in places such as Bosnia and Rwanda. Major governments responded slowly and ineptly. In time, increasing signs of regression being transformed into barbarism prompted more effective responses.

In this ambitious book William Shawcross—the author of "Sideshow," an excoriating account of Henry Kissinger's policy in Cambodia which won the George Polk Award for reporting—charts the man-made humanitarian disasters of the decade just ended. He calls them "endless conflicts" devised by "warlords," implying that they are but secondary threats to world order. Yet as his title also suggests, massive eruptions of state-sponsored crime are an outburst of evil in our time, and

while no major power has direct interests at stake, conflicts such as these disturb the equilibrium so much that something has to be done about them.

In his search for what Shawcross calls a "global architecture" to address "postmodern wars," the narrative jumps from Cambodia to Iraq, from Somalia to Rwanda, and Bosnia to Sierra Leone, paralleling the travels of U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The premise seems to be that to the extent these conflicts can be addressed at all, the United Nations holds the key with such tools as U.N. peacekeepers and the organization of elections. The problem with this perspective (and I should mention that Shawcross contributed to "Crimes of War," a new book which I co-edited; in turn, he lists me in his acknowledgments) is that the U.N. system during the early 1990's proved to be a house of cards, not of reinforced concrete. The U.N., as a global institution, was as incapable of addressing the issues as the governments that provided the building materials.

The world-view here is purveyed by what the book jacket calls "global policymakers," which translates roughly into U.N. officials. Among them is Yasushi Akashi of Japan, who served as top U.N. administrator in both Kampuchea and in Bosnia; Shawcross not only traveled on Akashi's helicopter in Cambodia but also talked to him a good deal about Bosnia. This is the same man who was in charge of all U.N. civilian personnel and military forces, and the communications between them



and U.N. headquarters during the Serbs' destruction of Srebrenica, a U.N.-declared safe area. What emerges is perhaps the only account that relates Europe's worst atrocity since World War II from the perspective of the man directly responsible for keeping the world's promise of protection.

It is of interest to read Akashi, in a memo to Annan, then Under-Secretary for Peacekeeping, circumspectly pulling the plug on Srebrenica as it is about to fall. "It is essential now for members of the Security Council to focus on humanitarian assistance, rather than suggesting, even obliquely, that the status quo ante can be re-established," Akashi wrote. Shawcross lets this stand

without comment, and this points to the big pitfall of “insider” journalism as opposed to the investigative variety. One would hope that a widely admired author like anyone else has a conscience that jangles as he boards the aircraft of the responsible high officials. They have an inside story to tell, but is it *the* story? How likely are we to challenge those who offer such hospitality? And are high-level briefings ever a substitute for the facts gathered the hard way at the ground level?

The tough questions do not seem to get asked in this account, which contains far too many controversial judgments not backed up by documents or footnotes. Moreover, Shawcross all but deifies U.N. officials. Of course the title, “Deliver Us From Evil,” is the giveaway, for the prayer is directed not to the Lord but to Annan. The Secretary-General, according to Shawcross, is the “secular pope... charged with the moral leadership of the world,” and “the repository of hope and the representative of such civilized standards of international behavior as we have been able to devise.”

The prone posture produces flat exchanges. “You’re negotiating all the time between different levels of evil, aren’t you?” Shawcross asks Annan early in 1999 after they discussed the situations in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, and Iraq. The setting is a hotel room in Davos, Switzerland, a less magical mountain, perhaps, than it once was, yet the right place for such a question. “This is the problem and they are constantly shifting,” Annan replies. “It looks like a terrifying ride,” observes Shawcross. “It is a terrifying ride!” Annan affirms.

That is the discourse. There is no follow-up. One wishes he had pursued the thought: “Are you doing the right thing in negotiating with levels of evil? Where does it lead? Can you deliver anyone from evil if you don’t stop the evil? Are you perpetuating evil by negotiating with it?”

This is not to say that Annan is not already the best Secretary-General since Dag Hammarskjöld, rather than the U.N. constitutionally is an imperfect instrument led even by a gifted statesman. The questions not asked point to the contradiction at the heart of this book.

U.N. officials, if they lack the threat of force to back up diplomatic goals, have little choice but to allow the stronger side to work its will, adjust the diplomacy to the realities, and offer to mediate. Even if one side commits genocide, it is irrelevant, for moral judgment has to be tailored to the means available. But this approach simply does not work. The U.N.’s very weakness telegraphs itself both to the perpetra-

tarian law. Ethnic cleansing was the evil from which millions of innocent civilians needed delivering, and Owen, on behalf of the U.N. and world community, was doing the exact opposite. Shawcross renders no judgment on Owen’s cynical dismissal of the fate of Bosnia and its people; his statement marked a low point in U.N. leadership from which the organization has yet to recover fully.

...are high-level briefings ever a substitute for the facts gathered the hard way at the ground level?

tor and victim, each of whom sees no choice but to pursue the death struggle. Thus those acting in the name of ending crime may instead be prolonging it.

Nothing better illustrates this than David Owen’s admonition to Bosnians to surrender to ethnic cleansing in early 1993. Owen was the envoy of the European Community, whose members dominated the Security Council during most of the Bosnian war. He was personally familiar with the details of ethnic cleansing, for he had taken a brief trip to Banja Luka in late summer 1992 and received a full account of deportations, mass killing in concentration camps, and other crimes against humanity. Owen’s solution, tailored to the means available, was an ethnic division of Bosnia by cantons that legitimized the crime. His peace plan, co-authored by Cyrus Vance, the former U.S. Secretary of State, had no security annex and no agreement on implementation. It relied for enforcement on Serbs, and to a lesser extent Croats, who together had the weapons and the willingness to use them in war crimes.

According to Shawcross, the Muslim-led Bosnian government “stalled” and the United States “undercut” the plan. This led Owen to warn the Bosnians: “Don’t, don’t, don’t live under this dream that the West is going to come in and sort this problem out. Don’t dream dreams.” That may have been a realistic assessment of international politics at the time, but it was the abandonment of principle and humani-

If one lesson might be drawn from the 1990’s, it is that just as domestic laws require enforcement, “deliverance from evil” internationally requires the willingness to use force. In the second half of the decade, NATO, led by the United States, began to make that point. In Bosnia, NATO stopped the conflict but failed to resolve the underlying issues, but the West created the Hague Tribunal to determine accountability for the crimes. NATO’s twin actions of 1999—its expansion into East Central Europe and its intervention in Kosovo—set in place a security structure that can prevent future Bosnias in East Central Europe. Bosnia, divided along ethnic lines, with two armies, police forces, and legal orders and thereby unworkable as a state, remains unfinished business, but NATO intervened in Kosovo and may act again in Montenegro.

The dreams of the early 1990’s are slowly becoming reality a few years later. So in this and nearly every other case that Shawcross cites of “evil” in our time, the question to ask is whether he has given the right address for his prayer. ■

Roy Gutman is a reporter in the Newsday Washington bureau and President of the Crimes of War Education Project based at American University, whose goal is to familiarize the media and the public with the laws of war.

International Journalism

In the fall of 1999, **Dragoljub Zarkovic**, Editor in Chief of the Serbian independent weekly VREME, walked out of a conference convened by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. It had been convened to allow Serbian, Montenegrin and a few Albanian journalists to discuss their coverage of NATO's bombing war over Kosovo. His reason for leaving: the strong attacks made on Serbia's independent media for the ways in which they conducted themselves under the strict rules imposed by President Slobodan Milosevic during the war. As The New York Times reported at that time, what upset Zarkovic was the willingness of many of the journalists "to draw an outrageous and defamatory line of equality between a regime, a nation and a media that has been waging a bloody battle against the authorities for 10 years.... I felt I had no option but to walk out."

Zarkovic's views about the war's coverage among independent journalists in Serbia begin this section. What follows is an updated account from **Ardian Arifaj**, Editor of KOHA Ditore, a daily Albanian-language newspaper in Kosova (the Albanian-language spelling), of what it's been like to rebuild the paper in the wake of the war. Perhaps most disheartening is his discussion about younger journalists, in particular, who question whether journalism is a worthwhile pursuit.

As a tenuous political peace continues to be negotiated in Northern Ireland, coverage of "the Troubles" and the aftermath is the topic of three articles. In the first, **Eddie Holt**, Television Critic of The Irish Times and a lecturer at Dublin City University, takes us back through these tumultuous decades in which journalists from Britain and Ireland searched for ways to explain the conflict given the censorship imposed by the government. And he touches upon the ways in which the constraints of conventional media narratives—of good and bad guys—do not make comprehensible the core problems of Northern Ireland.

Ed Moloney, Northern Ireland Editor of the Dublin-based Sunday Tribune, looks deeper into the ramifications of media censorship. Moloney writes, "My view is that censorship probably extended the life of the Troubles by as much as a third and that people died unnecessarily because of it. I say this because what censorship did was prevent the media from explaining events fully." In 1999, Moloney faced the prospect of prison when he appealed two lower court rulings demanding that he surrender to the police notes from his 1991 interview with a Protestant extremist facing a murder charge. The province's senior judge ruled in his favor in what was regarded as a victory for press freedom in Northern Ireland.

Shawn Pogatchnik, the Associated Press correspondent in Ireland during the past five years, describes the round-the-clock pace of reporting on a story that never seems to quiet down. He laments the lack of space he's had to tell what is a very complicated story. As he writes, "... within the confines of a 500-word breaking story... [g]ray, complex realities become a black-and-white media confection suitable for the least demanding palates." ■

A Serbian Journalist Answers Critics

Should independent media have agreed to government censorship during the war? 'Yes,' one editor says.

By Dragoljub Zarkovic

On the façade of Jadran Hotel in Kosovska Mitrovica (in Kosovo) there is a stone sculpture of a woman with seven children gathered at her feet. She is the grandmother of my father, who is one of those children. When my father's forebears, who were paupers in what today is the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, returned from America about 1919 as rich folks, they moved to Kosovo. History tells us that their ancestors moved away from that place in the 14th century, fleeing from the Turks.

Serbs claim they have emotional ties to Kosovo, that unhappy land. The only remnant of the Zarkovic family in Kosovo is the petrified sculpture of a mother with seven children. I was born in Belgrade but I traveled to Kosovo many times as a reporter. One summer night in 1981, the howling of dogs woke me from my slumber. It was only midnight. I approached the window and from the fifth floor of Hotel Grand in Pristina witnessed a ghostly spectacle. A pack of dogs were howling in the dark, their heads turned toward the lit hotel. The dogs controlled the empty streets in this dark city. Because of demonstrations by Albanians, a curfew had been declared.

Despite my origins and experience, I do not dare present myself as someone who is an expert on Kosovo. However, the sculpture of my great-grandmother and an ominous midnight experience give me an advantage over many people who spent tons of printing ink on proving that the solution to the knot of the Balkan problem is a bombing campaign. Today, more than one year after the bombing of Yugoslavia began (March 24, 1999), many things can be viewed more clearly, explained in greater detail, and understood more easily. This does not mean that the

world has become any smarter or better for it.

Regarding journalism during the war, there is an important point I'd like to make, and it concerns the role the independent media in Yugoslavia played during that time. By independent media, I mean those journalists who really represent the democratic potential of this country and who have been battling Milosevic's policies with far greater sincerity (including his policies toward the Albanians of Kosovo) and for a far longer period than the Western alliance has done. These journalists had very good political reasons and made very solid political judgments when they decided to accept the rigorous conditions of government censorship during the 80 days of bombing and to continue doing their jobs, which in any case is a mere matter of professionalism.

VREME weekly magazine, where I am Editor, is a leader in setting professional and political standards in this not-so-small group. In making this decision, we took into account the following reasons:

- We were unwilling to abandon our readers to pure propaganda, either to the propaganda of the Serbian government or to the propaganda articulated by spokesmen of the Western alliance.
- It was not fair to turn our backs on faithful readers who are suffering on a daily basis as victims of war, when our job is to inform people to the best of our abilities.
- The division into the good and the bad guys, into victims and criminals, was too simplistic.
- The war will last several months, despite whatever anyone said to the contrary at the beginning: It will

solidify the position of President Slobodan Milosevic.

- Kosovo will remain a political problem: The air attacks do not solve any problems.
- War is threatening the fragile, democratic potential of Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo.

When we look back at the dangerous reality of that time and we exclude several refugees who clamored loudly about the so-called betrayal by the Serbian independent media, reactions by the Yugoslav readers were universally positive. Lack of understanding about our decision to go along with the censorship rules was proportional to the geographic and emotional distance between the clamoring critics and the place where the bombs were actually falling.

After "the period of censorship," however, questions began coming at us from people throughout the world. They'd ask me questions such as, "Why did you publish during the war?" or "Didn't you become Slobodan Milosevic's allies by publishing?"

In the beginning, I gave lengthy and detailed answers to the first question. Then one day I came across a convenient paradox in an article by fellow journalist Dimitrije Boarov. His message effectively curtailed my willingness to respond. In a VREME article, Boarov wrote that had the citizens of Novi Sad known that the political fate of Milosevic depended on the bridges in their city, they would have destroyed them themselves! The situation is much the same with the media. If the media decided to be silent or to quit publishing, it would just be a nice present for Milosevic. Apart from his propaganda drums, there wouldn't be other voices heard in Serbia. As for the issue of

members of the independent media “being allies,” it can be answered by looking at actions. This year Milosevic is concentrating on destroying the independent media in Serbia. Hardly the way one would treat his allies!

It is, however, worth pointing to one interesting political fact. Anyone who wanted to use his or her head realized very quickly that there is censorship of the censors themselves, and we were given to learn this in very perfidious ways. Who was at the head of that supreme censorship could only be guessed at. Perhaps he or they were fictitious.

This would have been masterful deception had that actually been the case. The interposition of an invisible power in the game being played between the government and the citizens appears efficient. One office is carrying out repression by limiting and denying certain previously relevant rights and freedoms. Its power is small when compared with an invisible authority. This invisible authority acts ominously; in time, you come to recognize it as your own fear. You are constantly being sent the message: Yes, you passed the censorship, but that means nothing, you must satisfy us also!

After considerable argument and battle—that was unwarranted by the actual news item—VREME managed to publish that Radio B92 had been essentially closed by an official decision passed by Belgrade’s Court of Commerce. But the censors asked VREME’s editor in chief that in the event problems arose he would say that the cen-

sors had not seen this news item! We did put together an entire page on the death and funeral of Slavko Curuvija, Founder and Editor in Chief of the daily Dnevni Telegraf and weekly Evropljanin, who was murdered at his doorstep in Belgrade on April 11, 1999. Three days earlier, media controlled by Milosevic published that Curuvija was an ally of the enemy who was advocating NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. We managed to convince the censors that it was necessary for us to write about his death and funeral. This time the censors told us we could get into real trouble for doing so but that we should say that the material passed the censors! When we asked the censors

the censors. Under such conditions we had to bend over backwards in order to bring as many facts as possible to our readers. Our security was in jeopardy.

Statements made by Western officials also contributed to making our jobs more difficult and our security more perilous. For instance, Robin Cook, British Minister of Foreign Affairs, announced details about the amount of aid his government gave to Belgrade’s Radio B92. This gave Yugoslav authorities arguments for accusations similar to those that probably led to the murder of Curuvija. NATO spokesman Jamie Shea announced that Veton Surroi, Baton Haxhiu, Shkelzen Maliqi, and others

had been killed. After that, we spoke to Veton Surroi over a cellular phone. The number of mass gravesites grew staggeringly with the increased intensity of the bombing. Those of us who are more familiar with the political situation and with the actors in the field were suspicious of the sources that NATO quoted.

The citizens of Serbia, who refused to be destabilized by state propaganda and satellite programming of Western stations (watched closely during air alerts) were looking for a balance in

the reporting of independent electronic media (Radio Pancevo, for instance) and in newspapers which were still being printed. Perhaps we didn’t have all the important news. Certainly we lacked editorials that would help to explain developments to people. As far as in-the-field reporting goes, we could not even consider it when our move-



A funeral procession leads the coffin of prominent Serbian opposition journalist Slavko Curuvija, owner of the daily Dnevni Telegraf, who was killed in Belgrade April 11, 1999. *Photo courtesy of Reuters.*

whom we were supposed to lie to, whom we had to tell the truth to, and who is the one who decides who gets closed down despite the fact that the censors approve material, we never got a straight answer.

Every dictatorship is based on this invisible power. The supreme principle is fear, and we saw this in the eyes of

ments were limited—foreign reporters were in a slightly better position because the Army occasionally permitted them to travel to Kosovo. But at the very least, the independent media that reported during the war were free from primitive propaganda and from hate speech.

Phillip Knightley's book, "The First Casualty," which collected dust on the shelves of various editorial offices in Belgrade prior to the NATO aggression against Yugoslavia, became very popular with our journalists beginning on March 24. This is of little surprise, given that Knightley's work deals with the history of war reporting and, of course, with censorship from the time of the Crimean War to Vietnam. In short: It is instructive reading.

When a state of war is declared—and in Yugoslavia that state of war was declared when the first bomb fell in Montenegro—censorship naturally follows. This has been the case always, from the battles in Crimea to the massacres in Vietnam, and it exists in differ-

ent forms in all countries. Conflict between journalists and censors unfolds on the thin frontline, a line dividing two powers, the state and the media. And there is an imaginary line in no man's land where it is easy to lose sense of what is the protection of the state and the people and what is the protection of those in power. Knightley showed that censorship was most rigorous and perfidious in those countries that want to present themselves as models of democracy and of freedom of the press.

Dealing with censorship is part of the fate and the job description of the journalistic profession amidst the great tragedies of war. It is normal and acceptable as long as it protects the specific defense interest of a country. It respects the convention of sparing a government and its institutions from uncontrolled criticism while war efforts are continuing. But it becomes torture and crime perpetrated over the public word and freedom of thought when someone attempts to protect

narrow political interests or to continue media censorship after a war has ended.

Neither Serbian journalists nor the Serbian censors (incidentally, many of the former are predisposed toward doing the job of the latter) were able to avoid the traps of this unpleasant business. In that, we are not alone. At one point in his book, Knightley quotes what one official U.S. censor said in a meeting at the start of World War II: "While the war lasts don't report anything. When the war ends, report who won!"

All censors have the same logic. A specific problem in Serbia is that in the war between the state and the media, we still do not know who is the winner. When we find out, we will let you know. ■

Dragoljub Zarkovic is Editor in Chief of Belgrade's VREME weekly magazine.

Does Journalism Matter?

After the war in Kosova, Albanian reporters reassess their work.

By Ardian Arifaj

"A lot has changed. The way we work, the way we feel about our work, the way others feel toward our work..." says Garentina Kraja, journalist of KOHA Ditore, the Albanian newspaper in Kosova [the Albanian-language spelling], when talking about her job as a journalist in Kosova in months after the war. "During the war, working in a paper and reporting about the war, was the only thing that seemed to have any meaning. We were reporting about what was happening, and those reports did make a change, I think. After all, I think that the reports of the journalists about the atrocities helped to

convince the international community to intervene in this conflict," says Tina, the name everyone calls her.

"Then, we believed in what we did, and we thought, we can do a lot," she adds. "But today we see that, actually, we are not that powerful. All our work and effort is not making things move for the better."

Such are the dilemmas that almost every journalist at KOHA Ditore faces today. KOHA Ditore is the leading Albanian daily, published in Prishtina [the Albanian spelling], capital city of Kosova. It is also printed and distributed in the majority of the countries of

Western Europe where there is an Albanian community. "The circulation of the paper, in Kosova, is at around 18,000 copies each day, seven days a week," says Luan Dobroshi, the Director of the newspaper. This is almost half of the circulation of the paper just before NATO air strikes began on March 24, 1999.

The Serb campaign against the Albanian population of Kosova also intensified. KOHA Ditore was among the first targets of Serb paramilitaries. During the air strikes, when around one million Albanians from Kosova were deported into Albania, Macedonia and

fun at all..." explains Haxhiu, describing some of the everyday frustrations faced by every journalist at KOHA Ditore, frustrations that they should not have to face.

"But the most worrying thing is the way our journalists feel," says Haxhiu, as he talks about the new pressures journalists are confronting. "When UNMIK, (United Nations Mission in Kosovo), OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), and almost 200 NGO's rushed to Kosovo, they were all looking for good personnel. And journalists of our paper are skilled enough for their standards. And they pay twice as much as we do, although we did raise the salaries of our journalists 100 percent," he says. "The new circumstances have changed a lot the way our journalists feel about their job. Now, their very physical existence is not endangered from war. Today, they have different existential problems. They are in their mid- or late-20's and would like to see that they do something for their future, have a good job, are well paid, and the job of the journalist is not good enough for this, according to them," says Haxhiu.

"Even we the journalists here sometimes get the feeling that there are other things, more important or more promising, we could be doing, instead of writing for a newspaper," says Lundrim Aliu, a 25-year-old journalist at KOHA Ditore. "People nowadays are more interested in their personal lives, in making money, in rebuilding their property, and much less interested in reading newspapers, that is in reading what we write. The news we bring, no matter how interesting it might be, does not directly apply to their safety as it did before. On the other hand, very often one gets the impression that things we write or could be writing do not make any impact or any difference for the society," says Lundrim.

Today many of the stories that are published in KOHA Ditore focus on the rebuilding of the postwar economy and institutions. As Editor in Chief Haxhiu explains, "establishing the basis of true civic and democratic and free institutions are the main focus of the paper today. This means that every-

thing that is an obstacle to achieving these goals is a concern of the paper, including ethnic violence and organized crime.

"Still, political developments in and around Kosova remain our reporting priority. Everything else here depends on political developments," Haxhiu continues. "Therefore, the way that internationals are behaving in Kosova, the ideas about Kosova and lack of vision of what and how to build in

be built in Kosova."

Haxhiu admits that one of the correspondents from one of the municipalities in central Kosova never filed a story about a physical attack on a local politician. This politician was a member of a political party that is an opponent of the PPDK political party that emerged from the political wing of KLA (Kosova Liberation Army, the armed force of Albanians of Kosova that fought the Serb forces in the province). "I think



An ethnic Albanian refugee reads a paper looking for news from his hometown of Meratovice in the Stenkovic refugee camp in Skopje. *Photo by Zohra Bensemra, courtesy of Reuters.*

Kosova, and the way local politicians are behaving in present circumstances and the consequences of this unclear and undefined situation, these are our main concerns."

Some other journalists add that there are still some fundamental problems with freedom of expression in Kosova, and this makes their work frustrating and, at some point, even unbearable. "Well, we cannot be proud with our standards of freedom of expression," says Haxhiu. "We have had our real newspapers only after World War II, and the Communist era was not actually the perfect environment for building a culture of freedom of speech. This is something that we will have to build now, in the civic society that will

our journalist was afraid to report about this," says Haxhiu, adding that, still, there were no reports of attacks on any journalist, from any media in Kosova, since the war ended.

"It is not perfect, yet, but I think that the worst period is behind us," Haxhiu concludes.

Perfect this job is for Lindita Camaj, 22, who just started working for KOHA Ditore. "It is interesting, challenging and we can help a lot on making things change for better," she says. ■

Ardian Arifaj is Editor of KOHA Ditore, a daily Albanian-language newspaper in Kosova.

The Troubles We've Seen

In Northern Ireland, the journalists search for explanations.

By Eddie Holt

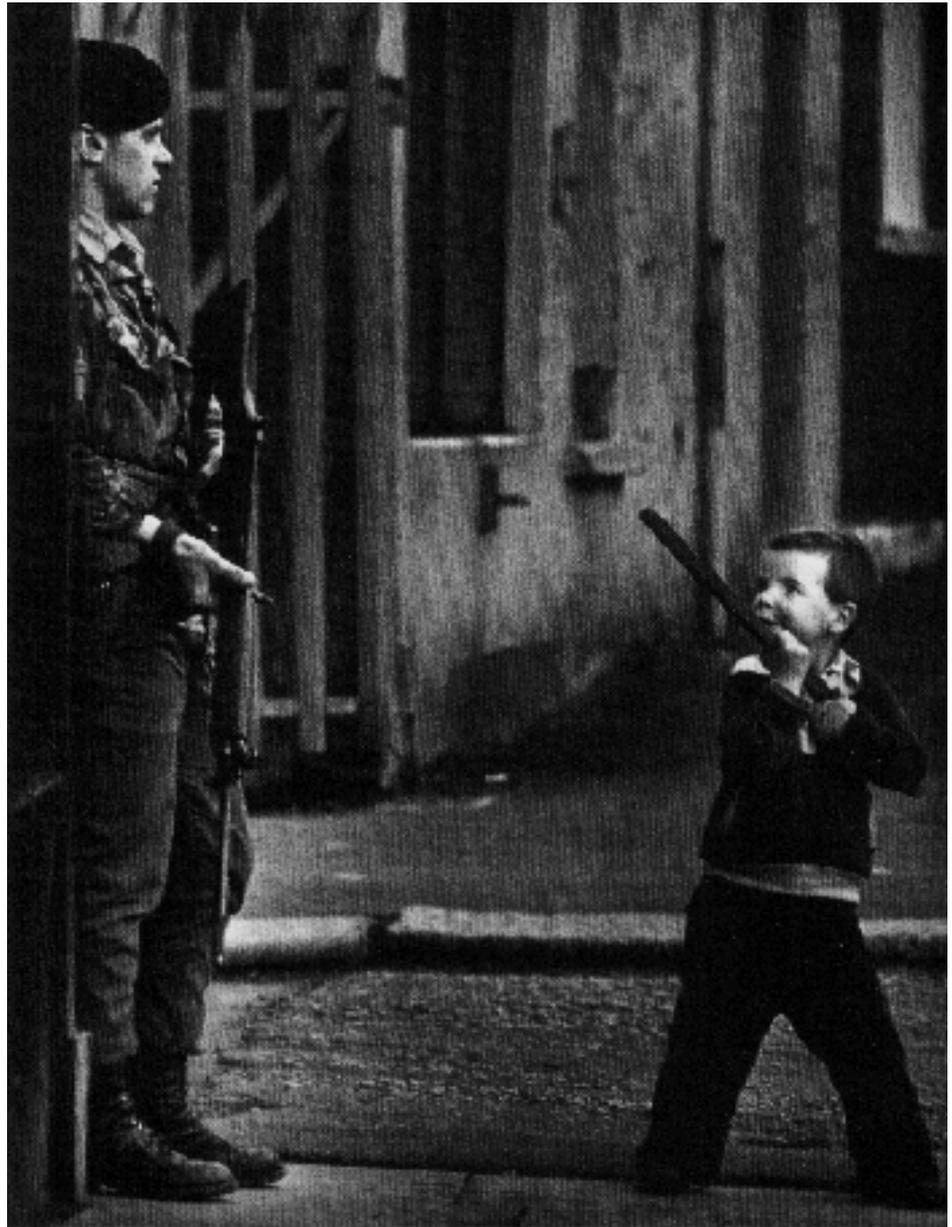
Television detonated “the Troubles” in Northern Ireland. Inherently unstable because of competing British and Irish nationalisms, the state was political nitroglycerine anyway. When television jolted it, the mix exploded.

Three episodes televised during the 1960's were seminal.

The first came from America. When television news of the black civil rights campaign gripped viewers throughout Europe, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) copied in detail the protest tactics of Martin Luther King, Jr. to highlight injustice. The second episode occurred in the Republic of Ireland, when Irish state television (RTE) broadcast passionately patriotic celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising which had led to political independence from Britain for the 26-county state. The third involved RTE footage of Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) policemen attacking civil rights marchers in Derry in October 1968.

Such was the transforming power of moving pictures that these images did what words alone had not.

In Northern Ireland, the media's entangled roles of observer and player have been easy to recognize but more difficult to unravel. Like the conflict itself, it's essentially a matter of competing contexts. (Irish nationalists are a minority within Northern Ireland but a majority on the island of Ireland.) The intricacies of the media knot bewilder most observers. During the last 30 years, British media, print and electronic, have been the most influential in shaping world opinion. For the most part, these have, not surprisingly, sought to cast Britain as an honest broker rather than a combatant in the dispute. However, liberal sections of the British media have frequently been



A child points a stick gun at a British soldier in Belfast, Northern Ireland. *Photo by Stan Grossfeld, courtesy of Grossfeld/The Boston Globe.*

more forthright than have most mainstream Irish media in challenging this position.

The more conservative British broadsheets, *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*, the mid-market papers, *The Mail*

and *The Express* as well as Fleet Street's notorious “red-top” tabloids have cast the conflict in the starkest terms as simply a war against unprovoked terrorism. On the other hand, *The Guardian* and a number of groundbreaking

investigative TV documentaries (from both the BBC and commercial TV in Britain) have consistently sought to portray all sides of the conflict. None, of course, has condoned political violence but the existence of institutionalized injustice has been acknowledged.

Through the combination of naiveté (RTE's 50th anniversary of 1916) and duty (televised news of civil rights marchers being attacked in America and Derry), the media—most noticeably television in the Republic of Ireland—accelerated the onset of the Troubles. However, this all happened before a resurgent IRA went on the offensive in Northern Ireland in the early 1970's. Since then, the dominant concern for most mainstream media in the Republic (RTE, The Independent Group of newspapers and The Irish Times, the influential organ of liberal bourgeois Ireland) has been to protect the integrity and international standing of the 26-county state. This has resulted in trenchant and repeated condemnation of all paramilitary groups, not least the IRA, and broad-based support for the constitutional Irish nationalists of John Hume's Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). At times, Ireland's best-selling newspaper, the Sunday Independent—liberal in its portrayal of social policy, conservative when it comes to economic policy, and celebratory of the "good life" in its vibrant coverage of sex, glamour and wealth—has supported the unionist position even ahead of the moderate SDLP's.

Perhaps what is most difficult for American journalists to understand is the culture of media censorship in Ireland and Britain, which has had an impact on the kind of coverage "the Troubles" have received. With no equivalent of the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment, censorship is routine. During several decades of coverage of the conflict in Northern Ireland, government censorship, by the standards of the Western democracies, has been draconian. Between 1974 and 1994, Section 31 of the Republic's Broadcasting Act banned a number of organizations from appearing on radio and television. These banned groups included Sinn Fein, the political wing

of the broader republican movement that also includes the IRA.

Supporters of the ban (among them most of the major Irish and British newspapers) claimed that militant republicans were fascists out to subvert not just Northern Ireland but the Republic also, and therefore censorship was justified. Opponents argued that such demonizing of republicans allowed them to avoid facing up publicly to atrocities, thereby prolonging the conflict. Furthermore, opponents insisted, the ban was patronizing and anti-democratic since it assumed that the license-fee payers (all those who own a television set must pay a fee to support the state broadcaster) who funded RTE would be incapable of recognizing and resisting propaganda. Others charged that state censorship is inevitably a form of state propaganda.

The stated position of the National Union of Journalists in Ireland was against Section 31. But the union's broadcasting branch at RTE implemented the ban with an alarming meekness that struck many journalists as being suspiciously close to support for it. Section 31, though it has not been activated since 1994, remains as the deepest ideological fault line among Irish journalists. European journalists, fearing the dangers inherent in the principle of state censorship, regularly lobbied for its removal.

It's impossible to know if Section 31 saved lives or caused them to be lost by prolonging the conflict. But it is certain that American journalists would not have put up with it. It must be understood that, unlike America, Britain is a very hierarchical state, still dispensing feudal titles. Because of the monarchy, there is no such creature as a British citizen. British people are subjects of the crown. By contemporary Western standards, Britain is a secretive society and its media are tightly controlled by law. In the Republic of Ireland, although its people are citizens not subjects, the legal climate remains strongly influenced by the paternalism prevailing in Britain. So Section 31 in Ireland and similar legislation in Britain made reporting the conflict unduly difficult.

At the core of all arguments resides the notoriously thorny question of the

right of states to censor versus the right of individuals to know. Equally problematic in ethical terms has been the fact that violence has generated the preponderance of international media attention in the North. Given the nature of news, that, of course, is not surprising. But it has inevitably distorted world opinion. For example, even though the conflict has produced appalling acts of mass murder, fewer people have been killed by political violence than in automobile accidents in Northern Ireland during the last 30 years.

Yet in an ever more connected global environment, the international context of the conflict will ultimately be the determining one. For that reason, the propaganda war has been recognized by the contending parties in Northern Ireland to be of the utmost importance. Although fully aware of this perspective, even the most prestigious and influential media organizations rarely acknowledge, and even less often tackle, this reality. Indeed, instead of attempting to offer a sufficiently thorough analysis, commentators characteristically resort to expressions of exasperation and bewilderment each time an attempted political solution fails.

There's bitter irony in the fact that conventional media narratives of good guys and bad guys do not make comprehensible the core problems of Northern Ireland. Deep forces, defying reason and motivated by volatile instinct, mean that for Catholic republicans and Protestant monarchists, the soul of "the Troubles" is really about sovereignty of identity—the right to believe you are right to believe what you believe. Such metaphysical concerns or understandings are not the currency of the media, many aspects of which are actively hostile to absorbing such abstractions.

But not all ironies are bitter. Some, in fact, are deliciously sweet. In spite of the Irish, British and international contexts in which the media have addressed the conflict, some of the most hopeful signs are emanating from within Northern Ireland's own media. There, the pro-British News Letter and the pro-Irish Irish News last year published

joint editorials endorsing the peace process. If opponents can empathize with each other's difficulties, then there's always hope that concern for the common good will prevail over the claims of competing sovereignties.

Still, attitudes towards American intervention and the American media are salutary. Generally, unionists decry U.S. involvement because from their perspective the problems of Northern Ireland are an internal matter for the government of the United Kingdom. It's a view that emphasizes the legitimacy, moral and legal, of a sovereign state. Irish nationalists, on the other hand, tend to welcome American involvement. They are also invariably quick to remind Americans that as citizens of a republic, which used force to usurp the British crown, opposing Irish republicanism is ideological hypocrisy. It's a view that puts emphasis on the moral legitimacy of the individual and of popular sovereignty. In the event of a British withdrawal and a united Ire-

land, many among the contending parties could well just swap justifications. Northern Ireland is like that. Reason doesn't always rule.

While violence raged, the media organizations of Ireland, Britain and the international community quite rightly engaged primarily in reporting. Now that there is a peace, albeit an uneasy peace since the suspension of the power-sharing executive, Northern Ireland has slipped down on the world's news agenda. To some, it must seem as though a true solution will never be found, and anyway there are fresher, more violent conflicts to cover.

Because of certain irreconcilable contexts surrounding this conflict (such as the mix of population in Northern Ireland, its historic connections to the Republic of Ireland as well as Britain, its proximity to Europe, and its global context), it's always possible that there might be a fatal, potentially catastrophic flaw at the heart of Northern Ireland. But there's certainly a flaw in media

that refuse to let their reporting of this story evolve. The narrative of heroes and villains cannot explain this conflict. What is needed now are journalists who understand well what has ignited the passions of these people and who will move out from their parochial positions to examine what lies at the core of the intense emotions that travel across the popular divides. Without this kind of storytelling, sadly the stories of violence and hatred that have dominated news from the North for so many years might return again to the front pages and nightly newscasts. One thing we've all learned during coverage of "the Troubles" is that the mix of media and Northern Ireland can produce both explosions and explanations.

After an era of explosiveness, it's time for explanations. ■

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Media Censorship During 'the Troubles'

A leading Irish journalist ponders the consequences.

By Ed Moloney

Imagine, if you can, the following scenario happening in the United States. After more than a decade of censorship of radio and television coverage of a near-race war on the eastern seaboard, the union representing reporters in the electronic media finally summons the courage to challenge the federal government in the Supreme Court.

Instead of journalists celebrating this bid to restore freedom of speech, the reporter who doubles as the senior union official in CBS resigns in protest and angrily condemns his union leadership. No one in CBS or any other station raises a voice against him and, he becomes one of CBS's top stars.

The rules say that the court case has to be taken in the name of an individual journalist, but despite an extensive trawling operation in the mainstream media the union is unable to find anyone to volunteer. Top-flight reporters in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, Chicago and Los Angeles are approached but each one says no. They are too frightened to take a stand. Finally someone agrees to put his name to the case, but this person is not a superstar with a face known to tens of millions. An unknown reporter for an obscure Spanish-speaking radio station in New Mexico carries the flag of press rights into battle instead.

In a country with as strong a First

Amendment tradition as the United States, most journalists there would probably find it impossible to imagine such a thing happening in their own country or in any advanced Western democracy. Many would assume that events like those described above could only take place in some emerging democracy with no tradition of a free press.

They would be wrong, because this is exactly what happened in the civilized and supposedly democratic society of Ireland not very long ago. The reporter who resigned his office in the union, the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), worked for RTE, the state radio and television company, and he

is now the station's senior political correspondent. The man who eventually agreed to represent the NUJ in the challenge to our equivalent of the Supreme Court, the European Court for Human Rights, worked for a tiny Irish-speaking radio station in Galway, which is about as far away from Dublin and the center of the Irish media world as it is possible to go without getting your feet wet.

The NUJ lost its legal challenge in Europe, but events transpired to make their action redundant.

Thanks to the peace process in Northern Ireland the government in Dublin eventually dismantled the censorship laws in a move designed to edge the Provisional IRA and its political wing Sinn Fein into constitutional politics. Not long afterwards the British government abolished its own censorship regulations, and for the first time since 1976 coverage of events in Northern Ireland was officially untrammelled by state interference.

The Irish peace process has triggered a debate about the behavior of Britain and Ireland during the Troubles, particularly in regard to the way the actions of the police and military forces may have worsened the conflict. Debate on the role of the media has yet to start. Some might think that it is long overdue and, in particular, that reporters and editors should start to ponder whether acquiescence in the censorship of the Troubles only made the violence last longer.

Censorship has a long if not very honorable place in Irish history. The British imposed press controls during the 1919-21 war of independence, as did the pro-Treaty side in the subse-

quent Irish civil war. Newspapers were forbidden, for instance, to use words like "guerilla" to describe opponents of the new Irish government. Censorship lived on after the early Troubles. In the south of Ireland it took a less political and more religious form. The state censor was allowed to ban books and films on moral grounds, i.e. when they offended Catholic doctrine or values.

In Northern Ireland censorship remained entirely political. In the 1920's the pro-British Unionist government passed the Special Powers Act, a draco-



Brendan Caraher, four, visits his father's grave in Crossmaglen, Northern Ireland. *Photo by Stan Grossfeld, courtesy of Grossfeld/The Boston Globe.*

nian piece of legislation which gave the police the authority to ban any dubious expression of political thinking and to imprison those responsible.

Modern censorship in Ireland has its roots in the Northern conflict which erupted in 1970 and was to last for a quarter of a century. It was the government in Dublin that acted first. Alarmed by the rising violence and the wide-

spread public acquiescence in the IRA's activities and acting on the advice of Conor Cruise O'Brien, among others, it amended the Broadcasting Act in 1976 to control Irish radio and television coverage of the Troubles. Section 31, as it became known, made it an offense for any station to broadcast the spoken words of members of proscribed organizations, prime amongst them being, of course, the IRA and Sinn Fein.

The British were slower to act in such an open fashion. The early years of the conflict saw informal attempts to control coverage of the violence. In the BBC, for instance, every single program about Northern Ireland had to be vetted by top management before being aired. It wasn't until 1988 that Margaret Thatcher's government introduced regulations similar to those in the Irish Republic and censorship became formal.

There was very little resistance from the media to all this. Section 31 went unchallenged by Irish journalists. It wasn't until 1988 that angry British journalists decided that Margaret Thatcher's censorship law must be contested. Their resolution shamed their Irish colleagues into following suit. While the censorship laws did not legally apply to newspapers, they did in practice. The way that this worked could become a model for other conflict situations. Censorship of the electronic media

helped create an atmosphere in which it became career-threateningly dangerous for any and all reporters to delve into certain areas. As a result, self-imposed censorship thrived.

Self censorship applied mostly to coverage of the IRA and Sinn Fein, but its impact was also observed with coverage of other subjects which members of the press should have been

probing in depth such as allegations of serious miscarriages of justice. The Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four, and other innocent Irish people convicted of the most terrible bombings in Britain were eventually freed after commendable television investigations. Most of the evidence that set them free was available during their trials but 15 years were to pass before the media plucked up the courage to examine it.

When I started my life as a journalist working for Dublin newspapers the conventional view was that if you wanted to write about the Birmingham Six or Guildford Four that was tantamount to saying you were a fellow traveler of the IRA. It was the same if you wanted to write about the IRA. The reasoning was very simple and went like this: You had to be a fellow traveler because how else could you write about such people unless you talked to them like they were human beings and not the mindless monsters they undoubtedly were. And if you did that, then you must secretly sympathize with them. It was media McCarthyism Irish-style.

Not surprisingly, many journalists decided that in the interests of their careers and families it would be wiser to steer clear of such subjects. And so

out of a limited form of state censorship there grew an all-embracing self censorship.

Supporters of censorship claim that it helped curb support for violent groups like the IRA.

Perhaps they are right, although I suspect that censorship, like Prohibition, only made the forbidden more alluring. There is a more important question: What impact did press censorship have on the search for a peaceful settlement of the Irish Troubles?

My view is that censorship probably extended the life of the Troubles by as much as a third and that people died unnecessarily because of it. I say this because what censorship did was prevent the media from explaining events fully. One result was that public and government understanding was less than it should have been. When, for instance, Sinn Fein, the IRA's political wing, was successful in fighting elections in the early 1980's, the full importance of this development was completely misunderstood. Uninformed and even misinformed about thinking inside Sinn Fein, the alarmed reaction of public and government alike was to intensify censorship by boycotting and isolating people like Gerry Adams.

The British and Irish governments now know, of course, that Sinn Fein was at that point starting out on a journey whose inevitable destination was the present peace process. They didn't know it then because the media weren't permitted to find out and tell them. The media weren't able to tell them because most reporters never talked to Sinn Fein. They didn't talk to Sinn Fein because they were terrified of the personal consequences.

Sinn Fein's journey lasted nearly two decades. But how much quicker would it have been if people had been more fully informed about what was going on inside its ranks? How many more people would now be alive if nearly 20 years ago governments had realized they had a chance to show Sinn Fein that politics was preferable to violence? ■

Ed Moloney is the Northern Ireland Editor of the Dublin-based Sunday Tribune. Last year he was voted Irish Journalist of the Year. He has reported on Northern Ireland for 15 years.

500 Words Is Rarely Enough to Tell the Story

When one of them is Ireland

By Shawn Pogatchnik

For the past five years, I've had the rare privilege and burden of being the only staff American news reporter in Northern Ireland. When the unexpected strikes the peace process here—cease-fire breakdowns, late night riots, surprise political shifts—The Associated Press occupies the inside track compared with other U.S. media outlets. That's partly because of the network of local sources I built up before the peace process began. Just as often, it is because few other U.S. re-

porters have ever paid much attention to the undercurrents of backwater Belfast, so by the time the story hits the rapids, my competition is often still trying to get through Heathrow.

Back in 1990, when I landed here to do a master's degree in Irish history and politics and to cut my teeth as a foreign correspondent, most of my friends thought I was making a foolish decision. The place was mired in a medieval holy war that had little, if any, relevance to the outside world: That

was the conventional wisdom. But my student wanderings through Northern Ireland during the late 1980's had already convinced me that this wasn't right, and that U.S. newspapers' spotty coverage of life here rarely rose above confused caricature, and the spot story itself was primed to take off.

Even so, I'd wrongly presumed that the AP had well-established correspondents—bureaus, even!—in Belfast and Dublin. I only accidentally discovered this wasn't the case while I was com-

pleting my master's thesis and starting to carve a niche as a Belfast-based freelance writer. The first two news-lean winters meant a struggle to keep the project alive. I drove a junkyard car, complete with a Flintstones-style hole in the floor; typed with gloves on rather than waste money on coal for the fire, which I was never very good at lighting anyway, and tapped my credit cards to the max in hope that things would come right.

Thankfully, the bureau chief and news editor at AP London gave me increasingly regular assignments to test what I could deliver. Success begot success and I gradually wrote my way out of debt. Soon I was working full time for the AP, initially in London. After doing tours in Rwanda and Croatia, in 1995 I became the agency's first-ever Ireland correspondent, filing stories daily on events in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

These days, I have an office in my Belfast home that looks like the Ulster wing of the Library of Congress, with files and books from floor to ceiling. And thanks to mobile phone modem cards for my laptop, when the story moves outside Belfast I can file copy to the appropriate editing desks in London and New York just as fast. When summertime street confrontations over Protestant marches spark rioting in Northern Ireland, my newspaper competitors go to bed at their Belfast hotels. Meanwhile, I am camping in my car, filing leads on the latest casualties and destruction, driving warily through broken glass and past menacing youths and fretting about keeping my batteries charged through the "cigie" lighter. This redeye work usually appears only as insert material under other people's bylines in the reputedly most authoritative newspapers; the rest of America's press, more honestly, just runs the AP story directly.

At times my job of covering both parts of Ireland, simultaneously and round the clock, has seemed like asking a one-person bureau to report concurrently on Israel and Egypt. Though Irish nationalists may want the whole island to be united under one government, the contemporary reality is of two quite different worlds. There is the

north with its headline-grabbing spasms of violence, set against a backdrop of rival British Protestant and Irish Catholic demands. And there is the south with its less reported development into one of the most economically dynamic, outward looking, and culturally stimulating nations of Europe.

For a wire service supplying subscribers in Europe as well as the United States, there's no such thing as a day when Ireland doesn't produce at least one story. I've probably made the 100-mile drive between Belfast and Dublin a few hundred times, sometimes earning bylines from both datelines in the same news cycle.

The peace process that began in Northern Ireland in 1993 has dominated my life, with 1998 the most exhausting year. A gun attack on a Catholic pub at midnight on New Year's Eve of that year turned out to be a signal of what was ahead. As the champagne went flat at our Belfast home, my four-months-pregnant wife and I toasted in the New Year behind police scene-of-crime tape, talking with stunned survivors and watching forensics officers picking spent bullet cartridges off the pavement.

Events grew in intensity with each week.

- A spree of revenge killings.
- Round-the-clock negotiations that produced the Good Friday peace accord.
- An island-wide referendum to confirm sufficient public support for the deal.
- A far more problematic election to form a provincial legislature from which the new Catholic-Protestant administration was supposed to be drawn.
- A week of rioting that ended after three young Catholic boys were burned to death in their Protestant neighborhood.
- A car bomb planted by IRA dissidents that killed 29 people, the bloodiest attack in three decades of conflict.

Somehow in the midst of all this, I followed the Tour de France around the south of Ireland, the Pogachniks

shifted to a new office-home, and Jan gave birth to our first child, David.

Too much of the time, the sheer demand to produce copy as quickly as possible means reporting is done from the desk and over the phone. This was particularly true during the run-up to the Good Friday accord when, working alone, I often could beat the hundreds of reporters encamped idly outside the negotiating venue by phoning the politicians inside, directly on their mobiles, before they held their set-piece press conferences on live TV.

When a story is developing in Belfast, the deadlines keep coming and the phone keeps waking the baby. I rise to the seven a.m. radio news and soon am typing up the day's first lead, bound for morning newspaper deadlines in Europe and afternoon deadlines in America. I try to get my breakfast by lunchtime, because by then it's time to prepare a story for the U.S. morning papers. On those occasions when Belfast is locked in late night riots or negotiations, this story must be led and revised past midnight, when it becomes time to produce a fresh story for a new world-members cycle bound principally for Asia. On and on this cycle continues, complicated by an editing process that stretches across the Atlantic to Manhattan. Requests come in, too, from AP Radio in Washington to explain the latest news: "So, Shawn, understand there's been some trouble in Ireland. You have a minute?"

At times I've looked with envy at my wire service competitors in Reuters, who usually have two to five reporters in Ireland covering the same beat and for better pay. They take turns and get to sleep more regularly than I do. But the fact that I had primary responsibility for producing the Belfast copy worked to AP's advantage. While I could remain focused on producing a single story, wrapping together breaking political and paramilitary events, members of the Reuters team were often filing competing stories that their news desk either had to spend time combining or, more often, simply passed along in a non-publishable fashion to subscribers.

It would have been impossible for me to build a deep-seated list of sources

under the pressure of recent times. Fortunately, I'd already built one during my happy wilderness years in Belfast starting in 1991, when I socialized freely in Belfast, camping out on people's living room sofas after hours of increasingly candid talk and a few too many shots of Bushmills. These days spent with people from all walks of life—industrialists, politicians, soldiers, cops, paramilitary outlaws, ordinary decent criminals—provided me a network of intimate acquaintances that, though not bulletproof (five good sources have been killed, two others died accidentally), proved priceless once the bud of Northern Ireland's peace process unexpectedly appeared seven years ago.

As a result, I've not been reliant on the official channels of information within the British and Irish governments, police and party press officers, who are often deliberately kept as the last to know anything. Instead, I can make well placed calls to quickly stand up or knock down almost any story, then follow up with official ports of call if necessary. At one practical level, this has allowed me to confirm details of a bomb blast or a killing hours before they're officially released, essential in developing angles for the story.

Whereas the AP's spot coverage on Northern Ireland was once marked by by-the-numbers naiveté—"Police wouldn't say if the victim was Catholic or Protestant" and "No group claimed responsibility for the shooting/bombing" were favorite newsy-sounding admissions of failure—confidence in my sources allowed me often to scoop the competition. For instance, just after midnight on February 1, I was first to confirm publication of an arms decommissioning report that, because of its negative findings, would bring down Northern Ireland's new power-sharing government. Competition on confirming this development was severe. Yet the official sources continued to deny its publication for several crucial hours. During this time,

U.S. papers were going to print and Reuters kept leading with official denials as its Irish-based reporters didn't find independent confirmation of the report's existence.

The U.S. competition is usually farther behind, or absent entirely. After one particularly traumatic overnight clash involving cops and Catholics in 1997, I'd already been knocked out by a brick, revived and filed three leads by the time *The New York Times* arrived on scene—and, to my professional disgust, began interviewing me about what had happened, notepad in hand.

Some of the London-based correspondents acknowledge my edge and willingness to help with sources by making occasional "So what-cha think's gonna happen?" calls. The subtext is always: "Do I need to book a flight, or can I stay in London?" Others offer the full-court squeeze over dinner, by the end of which I can feel less like a reporter and more like a source. But as the Northern Ireland story has turned increasingly less violent and more po-

At times my job of covering both parts of Ireland, simultaneously and round the clock, has seemed like asking a one-person bureau to report concurrently on Israel and Egypt.

litical, the London-based crew have actually hired local journalists to provide them more formal advice on the significance of events.

More and more often these correspondents are producing Northern Ireland stories under London datelines. Sometimes the dateline gap stretches credulity further. During one important juncture in the process last November, when I was interviewing George Mitchell about his unexpected success in brokering a deal between Sinn Fein and the Ulster Unionists, *The Washington Post* covered the story under datelines of Madrid and Cincinnati! And no, there are no picturesque Irish villages bearing those names.

Building this competitive advantage

for the AP has felt rewarding. Yet, as I begin a sabbatical year to write a book about the past decade's dramatic changes in Northern Ireland, I am also mindful that the crush of breaking events means that many of the more touching, meaningful stories have gone untold. Conversely, most of the 2,000 or so articles I've produced have been too superficial and incomplete to have the impact I would have liked. The reason: To report honestly from Belfast for an international audience means winning a high-pressure struggle to reconcile two competing demands. I must present the day's news in such clear and simple terms that it cannot possibly confuse anyone. But at the same time, I must do this with sufficient context so that readers can form a realistic, fair picture of the environment in which news is taking place.

In practice, within the confines of a 500-word breaking story, these two objectives are often hopelessly at odds. The demand for clarity serves to obliterate any hint of sophisticated presentation. Gray, complex realities become a black-and-white media confection suitable for the least demanding palates.

Every person and thing in the Northern Ireland story must be explained, but there's no room to explain any of them adequately. So most are regularly chopped out of the portrait entirely. The rest are labeled in a cursory manner—for instance, the IRA-linked Sinn Fein party; the Ulster Unionists, the province's major British Protestant party; Peter Mandelson, Britain's minister responsible for Northern Ireland, et cetera. Even this exercise can quickly consume a third of an AP story's allotted space.

This shorthand labeling can cause all kinds of interpretive problems. Take the most basic one in Northern Ireland, "Catholic" and "Protestant." It's been impossible for me to get away from portraying this society as one torn between two religious tribes, because that was the convention established long before my arrival. Reflect-



“People in Northern Ireland are frightened and fearful their identity is going to be lost,” says Martin O’Brien of the Committee on the Administration of Justice. In a land where justice is often one-sided, O’Brien works for all sides.

Photo by Stan Grossfeld, courtesy of The Boston Globe.

ing this presumption, editors unfamiliar with the story regularly attempt to characterize the entire toll of the past three decades’ conflict, more than 3,600 dead, as victims of “sectarian violence,” a.k.a. the product of Catholic-Protestant hatred.

Yet the religious labels mislead. At least half of the killings had no clear sectarian motivation behind them. Irish Republican Army activists, only some of whom are practicing Catholics, didn’t seek the denomination of the more than 1,000 soldiers and police they slew. With few exceptions, the killers from all sides weren’t motivated by their take on Christianity—which is the only conclusion a general audience could possibly take from copy that labels protagonists as Protestants and Catholics.

The reality is that, just as with Catho-

lic Croats and Orthodox Serbs in the former Yugoslavia, the conflict in Northern Ireland has been driven by competing nationalists, British and Irish, whose antagonism has been reinforced by many factors, only one of which is religious division. Whereas members of the international media acknowledged the right of Croats and Serbs to hold their national identities and rarely referred to their different religious foundations (I’m not forgetting the Muslims, but that is a different article), most visitors to Northern Ireland from President Clinton on down make the mistake of referring to everybody here as “Irish.” This misconstrues the whole dynamic of the conflict. Not everybody in the Ulster Unionist Party is Protestant, for instance, but they all would consider themselves British. The best compromise I’ve been able to inject

into AP copy has been to refer to the province’s “British Protestants and Irish Catholics,” but I doubt this has really changed readers’ perceptions of the place much.

I’m determined to keep on trying. For a long time I just thought of Ireland as my assignment—and it is an incredible assignment. But it’s also become my home, better known to me than my native Washington state. Just as I’ve found it hard to switch off from daily events while working on my book, I can’t imagine ever leaving the place. Not while there are still so many good stories to do. ■

Shawn Pogatchnik, the Associated Press correspondent in Ireland, is a 2000-2001 Fellow of the Alicia Patterson Foundation.

Nieman Notes

Compiled by Lois Fiore

—1947—

Frank Carey died on November 5 in Alexandria, Virginia. He joined The Associated Press in 1940 and wrote about science, medicine and space during his 34-year career there. His survivors include three daughters.

Jay Geddes Odell died on January 11 at the age of 88. Odell began his career in the 1930's, when he worked as a reporter for the St. Paul Pioneer Press and as sports announcer for the radio station KSTP. Odell wrote for The Philadelphia Inquirer and served in World War II before his Nieman year. He was Managing Editor of The New York Star from 1948 until it folded in 1949, and later became Editor and Information Officer at the Committee for Economic Development.

—1953—

Robert E. Lee died on July 13 of emphysema. He was 80. Classmate **Watson Sims** writes that Lee "had a distinguished career with United Press, Ridder Newspapers, and the State Department. Most of his life was spent in Washington, where he found much to deplore in the media's growing devotion to profits and blending of entertainment with what he considered the sacred business of news." Survivors include a stepson and a sister.

—1954—

Hazel Holly died in June, 1999. Holly graduated from UC Berkeley and joined the staff of the San Francisco Examiner by the time she was 20. During World War II, she covered the founding of the United Nations and women's war efforts in the United States. After Holly's Nieman year she became Foreign Affairs Editor at the Women's Home Companion and Women's Edi-

tor at the Call-Bulletin in San Francisco. She ultimately left journalism to work as Public Affairs Director for the San Francisco Mental Health Association and later worked in Washington as a special assistant to the director of the National Institute of Mental Health.

Robert Emmet Hoyt died on April 6 of cancer. Hoyt was a reporter for the Akron Beacon Journal and Detroit Free Press and a Washington correspondent in the 1950's and 1960's. He wrote a political column for the Arizona Republic during his retirement until he became ill. Although Hoyt was primarily a print journalist, he worked in television in the United States and Canada and produced, with classmate **Douglas Leiterman** and others, one of the first public affairs magazine shows, "This Hour Has Seven Days," for the CBC.

Hoyt's survivors include his former wife, **Betty Shutrump**, four children, and 12 grandchildren.

—1956—

Don Marsh died on November 27 at the age of 72. He was the long-time editor of the Charleston (West Virginia) Gazette and won a Distinguished Writing Award from the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1987 for his weekly editor's column. He is survived by his wife, **Jerry**, who is a former Gazette reporter, and two sons.

Donald J. Sterling, Jr. died of pancreatic cancer in March. He was the Editor of the Oregon Journal from 1972 until it combined with The Oregonian in 1982. He began work as a reporter at the Denver Post in 1948. In 1952, Sterling returned to Portland to work as a reporter at the Journal. During the 1970's and 1980's he represented the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association at the Oregon Legislature.

Sterling is survived by his wife, **Julie**, whom he met while she was a reporter for The Oregonian, his sister, several children, and one grandchild.

—1966—

Robert Caro's "The Power Broker" was recently named one of the 100 greatest nonfiction books of the century by the Modern Library. Caro began work on "The Power Broker" during his Nieman Year. He is currently writing volume three of "The Years of Lyndon Johnson."

—1967—

Ken W. Clawson died in December at the age of 63. Clawson joined The Washington Post as a national staff reporter in 1968 and eventually became White House correspondent. He joined the White House staff in 1972 as Deputy Director of White House Communications and went on to serve as Director of Communications from 1973 until his resignation in 1974.

Clawson's survivors include his wife, **Carol**, two sons, a daughter, and six grandchildren.

Philip Meyer's book, "Precision Journalism: A Reporter's Introduction to Social Science Methods," published in 1973, was named to Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly's list of Significant Journalism and Communication Books of the Twentieth Century. Forty-four other books were chosen, including Walter Lippmann's "Public Opinion" and David Halberstam's "The Powers That Be." Meyer, who holds the Knight Chair in Journalism at the University of North Carolina, writes that his book was inspired by his Nieman year.

James R. Whelan shared the speakers' platform on October 6 with Marga-

ret Thatcher at the Annual Conservative Party Conference in Blackpool, England. The occasion was to honor former Chilean President Augusto Pinochet, victim—in Thatcher's phrase—of a "judicial kidnap" in Britain in October 1998. Whelan was the only American on the program and spoke on the historic dimension of the military regime in Chile. Two of Whelan's six books have dealt with Chile, including "Out of the Ashes: Life, Death and Transfiguration of Democracy in Chile, 1833-1988."

—1968—

Jerome Aumente will formally retire from his positions at Rutgers University on July 1 after 31 years at that institution. Aumente is Professor and Director of the Journalism Resources Institute, and Development Coordinator at the School of Communication, Information and Library Studies. Aumente will stay at Rutgers on a part-time basis as special counselor to the Dean of SCILC and to the senior university administration. He writes, "In this new capacity, I will focus on international programs; newer media technologies, and health and medical journalism and communication."

Floyd McKay's book, "An Editor for Oregon: Charles A. Sprague and the Politics of Change," has been published by Oregon State University Press. Sprague was the state's leading editorial voice in the post-World War II period and was governor from 1939-43. McKay spent 28 years as an Oregon journalist in print and broadcast, was Administrative Assistant to Gov. Neil Goldschmidt, and since 1990 has taught journalism at Western Washington University in Bellingham, where he is professor and chair of the department.

—1969—

Paul Hemphill's new book, "The Ballad of Little River: A Tale of Race and Restless Youth in the Rural South," was published by The Free Press in May. In 1997, the small town of Little River, Alabama was racked by racial violence. Hemphill's book is an exploration of

these events and of the price that a small town can pay for existing in near total isolation.

—1974—

Ellen Goodman and Patricia O'Brien are the authors of "I Know Just What You Mean: The Power of Friendship in Women's Lives," which was published by Simon & Schuster in May. The book intertwines portraits of friendships between women of various ages and professions with a narrative of Goodman and O'Brien's own relationship, which began during their Nieman year.

Lukas Prizes Awarded

The winners of the **J. Anthony Lukas** Prizes, awarded annually by the Nieman Foundation and Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, were honored on May 6 at the Harvard Faculty Club. The Lukas Prizes recognize outstanding nonfiction writing.

This year, the \$10,000 Mark Lynton History Prize went to MIT professor John W. Dower for "Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II." The urban historian Witold Rybczynski won the \$10,000 J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize for "A Clearing in the Distance: Frederick Law Olmsted and America in the Nineteenth Century." James Tobin received the \$45,000 J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award for his upcoming book on the Wright Brothers, entitled "Work of the Wind: A Remarkable Family, an Overlooked Genius, and the Race for Flight."

J. Anthony Lukas, a 1969 Nieman Fellow, won two Pulitzer Prizes, the first in 1968 for "The Two Worlds of Linda Fitzpatrick," a New York Times article on the life and death of a wealthy Connecticut teen involved in the counterculture; the second for "Common Ground," his 1985 book on desegregation in the Boston schools. ■

—1976—

Günter Haaf became Editor in Chief of *Gesundheit*, a monthly German health magazine, in December 1998. He writes that while the magazine is distributed solely by pharmacists, its editorial content is independent of the interests of the pharmaceutical industry. Haaf was Editor in Chief of the environmental magazine *Natur* from 1993 to 1995 and worked as a freelancer and consultant before moving to *Gesundheit*. He can be reached at Guenter.Haaf@munich.netsurf.de. ("Guenter" is the correct spelling.)

—1978—

Alice Bonner has been named Associate Director of the School of Journalism at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication. Last year, she completed a Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she wrote a history of press integration, "Changing the Color of the News: **Robert Maynard** and the Desegregation of Daily Newspapers." Maynard (NF '66) was a pioneering journalist and leading advocate of newsroom diversity, whose family owned *The Oakland Tribune*. Bonner is former Director of Journalism Education at the Freedom Forum.

Ken Freed spent six months as a Knight International Press Fellow this winter in Beirut, Lebanon. During this time he taught journalism at the Lebanese American University, ran workshops, and was a consultant to the English-language *Beirut Daily Star*. Now that the fellowship is over, Freed and his wife, **Sandra**, will remain in Beirut where Freed continues as consultant to the *Star*, working with Publisher **Jamil Mroue** (NF '77). Mroue reopened the *Star* three years ago, more than a decade after it was shut down during Lebanon's 15-year civil war. Freed writes that the paper is preparing to launch a Middle East edition with the *International Herald Tribune*. The *Star* is also recreating its Beirut edition, and Freed will be working on that edition's business section. He urges "anyone passing through Beirut and looking for

a beachside view of the Mediterranean and a plate of the best hummos known to man" to contact him at kfreed@cyberia.net.lb.

Danny Schechter, Executive Editor of MediaChannel.org, writes: "We have just launched a new media portal, the MediaChannel.org (at <http://www.mediachannel.org>), and you are invited to visit, surf through its many pages, check out the directories of Affiliated Sites and advisors, participate in online conferences, and tell us what you think.

"A nonprofit project of the Global Center and England's One World Online, Media Channel is already the largest network of media issues organizations and individuals in the world. It is produced by Globalvision New Media. We had hoped for 100 affiliates at launch; we now have 385 affiliates (as of April 22) including Nieman Reports. And we are just getting started. We welcome media news and 'whistleblowers.' I also welcome colleagues to download my new 'e-book,' 'News Dissector: Passions, Pieces, and Polemics 1960 to 2000,' a collection that includes some musings on my Harvard years. For excerpts and info: www.electronpress.com/schechter."

—1979—

Peggy Simpson recently completed an Alicia Patterson Fellowship, which she received to do research on the contribution of Polish entrepreneurs to Poland's surprising post-Communist success. While the fellowship is over, her research is not, and she expects to spend the better part of 2000 in Poland. Her e-mail address is psimpson@it.com.pl.

Nancy Day is now Director of Advanced Journalism Studies at Boston University's College of Communication. This program is designed for post-masters degree journalism students and mid-career professionals who want to acquire new skills or develop specialties in journalism.

Katherine Harting-Travers writes that "since July, I've been reporting a

weekly feature for the local CBS affiliate's TV news program called "Tech Support," which looks at the impact of technology on the lives of Delmarvans with an emphasis on the Internet." Travers also is Media Specialist for the University of Maryland Eastern Shore in Princess Anne and the mother of two. For more than two years previously, she was Marketing Director for a franchise that opened the first two Sylvan Learning Centers and a Sylvan Technology Center on the lower shore, in addition to her work with UMES.

Jane Perlez gave this year's Joe Alex Morris, Jr., lecture on March 8 at Harvard University. Perlez is Chief Diplomatic Correspondent for The New York Times. She has also been the Times's Bureau Chief in East Africa and Eastern Europe. The Nieman Foundation awards the Joe Alex Morris, Jr. Lectureship annually to a U.S. overseas correspondent or media commentator on international affairs. Morris, a 1949 graduate of Harvard and long-time Middle East correspondent for the Los Angeles Times, was killed in Tehran in February 1979 while covering the Iranian revolution. ■

—1982—

Alex S. Jones was named Director of the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Jones, currently the Eugene C. Patterson Professor of the Practice of Journalism at Duke University, will join the Shorenstein Center in July.

—1983—

William Marimow is the new Editor of The (Baltimore) Sun. Marimow had been that paper's Managing Editor. The outgoing Editor, **John Carroll**, (NF '72) was recently named Editor of the Los Angeles Times.

—1984—

Bruce Butterfield won a 2000 Alicia Patterson Fellowship. He will re-

search Malden Mills Industries, Inc., which is the last major textile mill in New England. It burned down in December 1995 and was rebuilt by its owner, Aaron Feuerstein. Butterfield will focus on the relationship between Feuerstein's commitment to social justice and the demands of global economics in the late 1990's.

—1987—

Doug Cumming has won a Freedom Forum accelerated Ph.D. fellowship at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at UNC-Chapel Hill. In May, Doug leaves the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, where he has been an editor and reporter covering education since 1990, to start the two and a half-year program at Chapel Hill. He will be living in Chapel Hill with his wife, **Libby**, and their three children, Daniel, William and Sarah.

Nancy Lee started a new job at The New York Times as of September 1999. She's now Director of Business Development for the News Services division, which means she's still in charge of the photo archives, but in her new capacity she also manages book development, digest products (TimesFax, Large Type Weekly), Upfront (newsmagazine for teens published jointly with Scholastic), Rights & Permissions, and licensing. She says she hasn't been this happy since she was a Nieman Fellow.

—1989—

Cynthia Tucker, Atlanta Constitution Editorial Page Editor, won a Distinguished Writing Award from the American Society of Newspaper Editors for columns on topics including Jesse Jackson's trip to Belgrade and Atlanta Mayor Bill Campbell's minority set-aside programs. Tucker's work was described as "a wonderful blend of tough and thoughtful...she takes on difficult issues with direct, even spare, word choices that are powerful and effective."

Bill Kovach will retire in June after 10 years as Curator of the Nieman Foundation. Kovach will live in Wash-

ington, D.C. with his wife, **Lynne**, and continue his work with the Committee of Concerned Journalists.

—1990—

Dave Denison is the new Books and Culture Editor at The American Prospect. Denison was previously Founding Editor of *CommonWealth*, a weekly magazine of “politics, ideas, and civic life” published by the nonpartisan think tank MassINC.

Dick Reavis writes that he is finally getting the credit he deserved when he challenged popular perceptions of the events in Waco, Texas. He writes, “‘Waco: The Rules of Engagement’ in which I appeared won two Emmys. Of course, I have to complain: For documentaries, there are no awards for stage talent. Otherwise, a golden trophy would sit on my desk. I’m also complaining about television. I’ve always said that it was for idiots. But the film won an Emmy, and my book didn’t win anything. I am now making my statements about Waco by radio and television. Tell Geraldo Rivera to look out.”

Juan Tamayo received a 1999 Maria Moors Cabot Prize for outstanding reporting from North and South America. Tamayo, who is a reporter at The Miami Herald’s world desk, was honored for his coverage of Central America and the Caribbean since 1982.

—1991—

Kabral Blay-Amihere was arrested and detained by Ghana’s military on January 13 in connection with an article that ran in the *Independent*, where he is Publisher and Editor. The article described the refusal of soldiers to march in the annual celebration of the 1981 coup d’etat that brought Jerry John Rawlings into power. The *Independent*’s article suggested that soldiers had refused to march because of complaints, including poor housing and reduced allowances for U.N.-sponsored peacekeeping operations.

Blay-Amihere was interrogated, without his lawyers, for two hours by seven officers. He was asked to identify his

sources (which he refused to do) and to explain his motives for publishing the story. The military gave Blay-Amihere a rejoinder for publication, asserting that the soldiers had not refused to march.

Then, on February 3, Blay-Amihere was invited to Police Headquarters, interrogated for three hours and warned he was under investigation for sedition and abetting crime. Under Ghana’s criminal code, he faces a minimum prison sentence of five years. As of now, he has not been charged.

Katherine Skiba, reporter for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, made three foreign reporting trips in 1999. In Poland and the former East Germany, she reported on the 10th anniversary of the fall of Communism. In Bosnia and Kosovo, she wrote stories on U.S. peacekeeping troops. Finally, in Germany again, on a trip sponsored by the Bosch Foundation and Atlantic Bridge, she wrote a short series, “One Germany, One Europe.” Another high point: studying writing in an intensive program led by Roy Peter Clark at the Poynter Institute. The year, and the century, ended with another excellent assignment: Skiba and her husband, **Tom Vanden Brook**, covered New Year’s Eve festivities in Times Square.

—1992—

Marcus Brauchli and **Maggie Farley** want their classmates to know they finally accomplished something worth telling with the arrival of their daughter, Aria Michelle, on April 6. Maggie is on maternity leave from the Los Angeles Times, for which she’s the U.N. and Canada Bureau Chief. Marcus is National Editor of *The Wall Street Journal*. The family recently moved to New York after many years where both reported from China.

Seth Effron has joined Capital Strategies, a Raleigh, North Carolina-based public relations, public affairs, and marketing communications firm, where he works with their technology and e-commerce clients. Effron was Executive Editor of Nando Media, the interactive division of the McClatchy

Company, and Editor of the insider, a daily online publication covering North Carolina government and politics.

Stan Grossfeld, photographer Bill Greene, and Design Director Catherine Aldrich of *The Boston Globe* received two gold medals from the Society of News Design. For the past 21 years, the Society has sponsored a worldwide competition which recognizes excellence in all areas of newspaper design. Grossfeld is an associate editor and photographer with the *Globe*.

Elizabeth Leland of *The Charlotte Observer* won the Thomas Wolfe Award, given for writing excellence in newspapers above 30,000 circulation. Her story, “New Love, 2 By 2,” was cited as a portrait of parents and children coping with death and aging with a strong desire to enjoy life. She also won the award in 1987, 1990 and 1992.

—1994—

Lorie Conway’s video, “Fabulous Fenway: America’s Legendary Ballpark,” was released for broadcast and distribution in May. The hour-long commemorative history of the 88-year-old ballpark includes interviews with former Red Sox players, veteran announcer Curt Gowdy, and archival photographs and film. Conway’s independent production company, Tribute Films, produced the film.

In May, Lorie and **Tom Patterson** plan to marry in Cambridge, Mass. at a location on the bank of the Charles River. Conway and Patterson met two years after her Nieman year at the annual orientation week reception. Patterson is Bradlee Professor of Government and the Press at the John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Nana Kofi Coomson has been elected President of the Private News Publishers Association of Ghana. This association promotes press freedom in Ghana and takes steps to improve the newspaper industry.

Frank Gibney, Jr., who has been a correspondent and bureau chief for *Time* magazine in Asia, is now based in

New York as a senior writer for the magazine. Gibney coordinates Time's coverage of international business and also reports on business.

—1995—

Karl Schoenberger, formerly of the Los Angeles Times, spent a few years as Hong Kong Bureau Chief and senior writer for Fortune. He came home to the San Francisco Bay area in 1997 to teach at the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley for a year, then became a visiting scholar at UC Berkeley's Human Rights Center. His book, "Levi's Children: Coming to Terms With Human Rights in the Global Marketplace," is to be published this spring by the Atlantic Monthly Press.

—1996—

Tom Ashbrook's book, "The Leap: A Memoir of Love and Madness in the Internet Gold Rush," is Houghton Mifflin's lead nonfiction title this spring. "My Nieman year plays a significant role in the story, as the stage on which I struggled with the idea of walking away from newspapering to start an Internet company," Ashbrook writes. "It's been quite a sojourn. After a truly hair-raising beginning, our company, HomePortfolio.com, now employs more than 100, with offices, beyond our Newton, Mass. headquarters, in Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Charlotte and New York. But oh, what a path we trod!"

Ann Woolner is now a senior writer at Brill's Content. Based in Atlanta, she covers CNN as well as any news organizations not based in New York or Washington. Woolner can be reached by e-mail at awoolner@mindspring.com.

Regina Zappa's book on Chico Buarque, a contemporary Brazilian composer and singer, was first printed in November 1999. "Chico Buarque, Para Todos," is now in its fifth edition and has sold over 45,000 copies. Zappa feels the book is successful because

Buarque, who has struggled with censorship and participated in the movements for free speech and human rights, is also known as a private person. "...the book reveals the human dimension of a normally very discreet and hidden personality," Zappa says.

—1997—

Maria Cristina Caballero received a World Press Freedom Award from the Committee to Protect Journalists in November 1999. Caballero, on leave from her job as Director of Investigations at Semana (Bogota, Colombia), is a Research Fellow at the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard. She has also been chosen as a member of the Kennedy School's Women Waging Peace program, an international network of women leaders working toward peace in societies torn apart by conflict.

—1999—

Chris Marquis has joined the New York Times Washington Bureau as a general assignment reporter. Just prior to that, he was the foreign affairs writer for all Knight Ridder newspapers, based

in Washington. Before that, he was diplomatic correspondent for The Miami Herald. ■

Three Niemans Named Among Heroes

Three Nieman Fellows were named to the International Press Institute's list of 50 World Press Freedom Heroes. The list, which spans the past 50 years, recognizes "journalists who have made a significant contribution to the defence and/or promotion of press freedom in their country or on a global basis...especially—but not only—if this involved acts of resistance or bravery under harsh conditions." The Fellows honored were **Percy Qoboza** '76, the former Editor of the South African papers The World and City Press; **Kemal Kurspahic** '95, former Editor in Chief of the Sarajevo daily Oslobodenje; and **Gwen Lister** '96, Founder and Editor of the independent daily newspaper The Namibian. Qoboza died in 1988. ■

The Murrey and Frances Marder Fund

The Murrey and Frances Marder Fund, established in November 1996, has provided the Nieman Foundation with support for three Watchdog Journalism Conferences (May 1998, May 1999 and October 1999). It also has paid for the costs related to publishing excerpts of the conferences and articles on watchdog journalism in four issues of Nieman Reports and on the Nieman Web site. An accounting as of 10/15/98 appeared in the Winter 1998 issue of Nieman Reports. An accounting as of 4/15/00 follows:

Income: \$145,323.44

- \$74,150.00 — Balance at 10/15/98
- \$ 3,152.62 — Interest on balance at end of FY'98-99 (6/30/99)
- \$68,020.82 — Income from endowment for FY'99-00 (7/1/99-6/30/00)

Expense: \$ 71,411.81

- \$34,085.70 — Watchdog Journalism Conference (5/15/99 at Harvard)
- \$15,260.62 — Watchdog Journalism Conference (10/18/99 in Washington, D.C.)
- \$ 7,885.49 — Nieman Reports/Fall 1999*
- \$11,870.00 — Nieman Web site*
- \$ 2,310.00 — Misc. related activity/ies

Balance: \$ 73,911.63

(*Amounts listed represent the portion of costs that were devoted to Watchdog Journalism.)

End Note

Bill Kovach received the Goldsmith Career Award for Excellence in Journalism from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University March 9, 2000. Here are excerpts from his speech.

Let me begin with full disclosure. The truth is, if my career deserves this award, I can't accept it as mine alone. I am surrounded here by ghosts who have directed and shaped my career—often against my own stubborn resistance....

What all these [ghosts] and others helped me understand is the obligation each journalist assumes when choosing a life as public witness, which is what one does when one chooses to become a journalist.... In the past few decades this responsibility of the journalist in a free society became both more vital and more difficult. The journalist today is engaged in a struggle to clarify and maintain the principles that assure the integrity and reliability the public deserves....

In 1979, when I became chief of the Washington bureau of The New York Times, we had no personal computers, no fax machines, no cellular phones, and the Internet was an instrument of the Cold War called ARPANET used exclusively by the military-industrial-scientific community.

All of that and more is now part of a revolution which, as an agent of change, has had few equals in its impact on...the world.... The impact on journalism has been at least as disorienting. The most obvious impact has resulted from two fundamental changes:

First, the mixing of media by digital technology, which merges all forms of communications—voice, pictures and print—on the World Wide Web, which creates new platforms to attract readers and advertisers.

Second, the fragmentation of the means of production and the choices

available means anyone anywhere is a potential competitor to traditional news organizations. Anyone anywhere is a potential customer. As a result, journalism appears in an atmosphere that erases the boundaries between advertising and editorial, in which it is difficult to distinguish journalism from commerce or to recognize the value of journalism among all the other information pumping through the system.

Recent polls in the United States which show a public increasingly frustrated and alienated by "the news media" have made this point with depressing force.... The reason for this loss of confidence in the press...is that the public can no longer distinguish between a journalist attempting to produce a disinterested, balanced presentation from a self-serving political line or tabloid sleaze....

This confusion is aided and abetted by the economic organization of the news industry in response to the development of the new communications technology.

The logic of the new marketplace is drawing journalism into a horizontal organization of communications conglomerates that exploit talent across media, making no distinction between the values which inform journalism and entertainment and commerce. And also into a vertical reorganization which brings together corporations with vastly different cultures, goals and values...to ingest entire news organizations which become divisions with a diminished role in the decisions of a company.

These emerging mega-corporations which include journalism divisions threaten to make the whole notion of conflict of interest by journalists an antiquated idea.... We must all question whether we can rely on a handful of behemoth corporations to monitor themselves—or the other centers of power with which they do business.

[S]lowly...journalists are beginning to react. Nearly three years ago now, a

group of 24 journalists met here at Harvard at the invitation of the Nieman Foundation to organize the Committee of Concerned Journalists. The organization has [since] engaged some 3,000 people in public forums to examine, articulate and promote standards of journalism and independence from self-interest communication and from commercial exploitation—an independence which would regain public trust and justify the continued protection provided in the First Amendment.

In a statement of shared purpose the Committee has circulated, here is what these journalists say defines their work: "The central purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with accurate and reliable information they need to function in a free society."

Over time journalists have developed the following nine core principles to fulfill that purpose:

1. Obligation to the truth;
2. Serve public interest first;
3. Monitor the powerful and offer voice to the voiceless;
4. Provide a forum for comment, criticism and compromise;
5. Employ an ethical method of verification;
6. Maintain independence from faction;
7. Make news engaging and relevant;
8. Keep news comprehensive and proportional,
9. Remain true to personal conscience.

To the extent journalists themselves can articulate, practice and defend these principles, and to the extent the public supports these principles and considers them important—to that extent only can the concept of independent journalism in the public interest...safely migrate onto the new web of instantaneous, interactive, multimedia communications spinning out around the world. ■

“...to promote and elevate the standards of journalism”

—Agnes Wahl Nieman, the benefactor of the Nieman Foundation.

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